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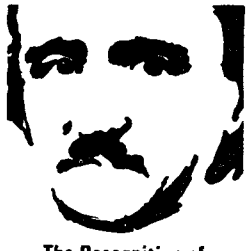

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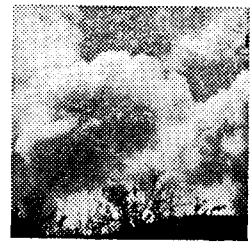

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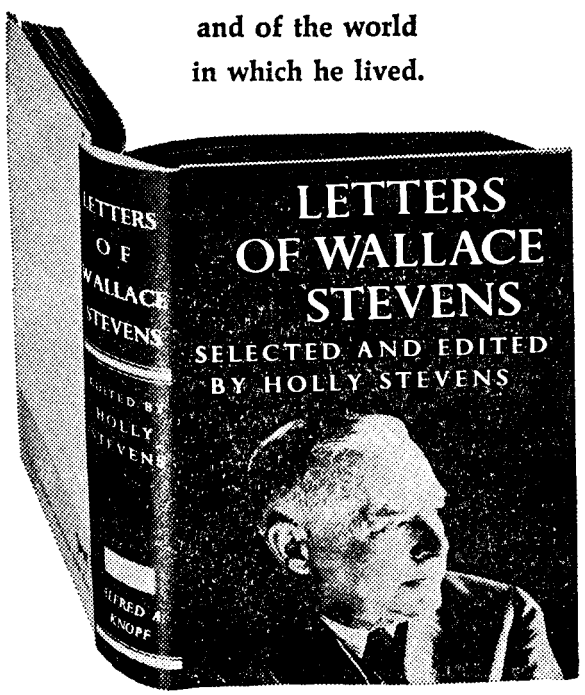

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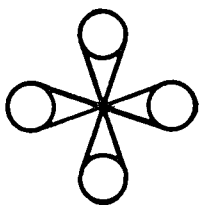

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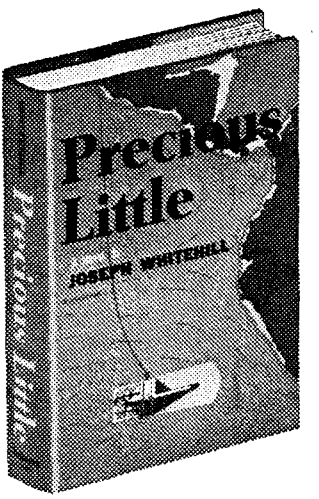

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RONALD PERRY

The Sin Xai

after the Lao of Pang Kham

INTRODUCTORY NOTES

Lao is one of the "Thai" family of languages, which are spoken in Burma, Thailand, Cambodia and Laos, and in parts of Vietnam and Yunnan. All of these dialects, like the majority of the peoples who speak them, derive from a common source, and are still so closely related to one another that intercommunication between them presents relatively little difficulty.

In addition to the common ground of language, and the shared or very similar racial, geographical and historical experience of the Southeast Asian peoples, all of these areas also share a common religious heritage. This consists of various forms of shamanism and animism, heavily overlaid and modified by the doctrines of Hīnayāna Buddhism. This elder and so-called "lesser vehicle" of Buddhism (as opposed to the Mahāyāna, or "greater vehicle," which gradually supplanted it from the 9th century A.D. onwards throughout most of Asia) is now preserved in Ceylon, Burma, Cambodia, Thailand and Laos only. From Ceylon, where it had been preserved since the 3rd century B.C., it was brought to Thailand in the 8th century; supplanted Mahāyāna in Burma and Cambodia in the 11th-14th centuries; and was introduced for the first time into Laos, the most remote and inaccessible of all the Southeast Asian countries, around 1340. From the beginning, its influence was so strong throughout the area that it is almost certainly the most important single unifying factor after that of the language itself.

As a result of these conditions, the literature of Southeast Asia is a fairly homogeneous one. Although the myths and legends and, to some extent, the philosophical and moral concepts on which they are based, vary slightly from one place to another, in general they form a common background for the literature of the entire area; so that the same fable, proverb or poem frequently appears, wearing a subtly different mask and playing a different

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set of variations on the original theme, in a number of localities at the same time.

*

In Southeast Asia, as seems to be the case in most parts of the world, literature really begins with music: with the wordless songs of hunt and harvest, battle and cradle, love and death, developing from these into first lyric, then narrative and epic poetry, and thence into prose.

Since the beliefs of the Southeast Asian peoples, especially prior to the advent of Buddhism, were primarily animistic in nature, the earliest Lao poetry probably took the form of chants and invocations of a magical kind to the ghosts and deities which were thought to be immanent in the natural world around them. It is difficult, I think, for us of the 20th century West to understand the full extent of this belief in the all-pervading presence *of divinity. For the pre-14th century Lao, the world was quite literally alive. Earth, air, fire, water—all were inhabited; every tree had its familiar spirit, every acre of ground its god or ghost. Even the advent of Buddhism, which wrought such profound changes in almost every sphere of life, did little to change this basically animistic bias. Historically, Buddhism, with its inherent lack of interest in cosmology, has never tried to supplant or eradicate the local superstitions and religious beliefs that came before it; but has for the most part accepted them as found, adding to them its own primary concern with the practical means of achieving release from the Wheel of mortality and the consequent enlightenment resulting from the cessation of suffering. Thus, in the following anonymous "Prayer," which probably dates from around the 16th century, three quite separate strands of thought can be discerned living quite happily side by side: the original animism native to Laos, Hindu cosmological detail brought by the monks from Ceylon, and a kind of moral underpinning that is essentially Buddhist:*

Divinities
Who are the populace of trees
Who inhabit the smoke on the mountains
Who live in deep caves
Who swim beautifully in our rivers

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Indra, Yama
Lokapala, the four spirits of the world
Angels and archangels
In our fastnesses we pray
That we may bear witness
Always in our own language

*

When Buddhism came to Laos from Ceylon during the reign of the first Lao king to unify the country, Chao Fa Ngoum (1316-1374), it brought with it a whole new literary tradition in the form of the Pāli Tripitaka, *which contains the scriptures of the Theravādin school of Hīnayāna Buddhism. This had an immediate and enormous effect on all aspects of Lao culture, and, in a very particular and special way, on its literature.*

In order to teach the new "religion" to the Lao people in its prescribed canonical language, Pāli, the early Buddhist monks prepared parallel Pāli-Lao bi-lingual versions of the Tripitaka *texts. Since the "Thai" languages are also directly related to Pāli (which is in turn a derivation from Sanscrit), the Lao and Pāli words almost always had the same root, or at least utilized some of the same consonant and vowel sounds. This resulted in a heavily-stressed and rhythmical effect, full of alliteration and assonance, which proved to be extremely useful as a mnemonic method of teaching the new doctrines. It also, as a sort of side-effect, contributed greatly to the development of a formal discipline and technique for Lao prosody. An example of this effect is contained in this "Advice to a Young Man from a Grandfather":*

Nămô nama vănda kapsĭt
Kaptĭt kaptō kapkō penkan
Pentăm nam kap lan sōn pu
Lan hak nu het pu săn sōn
Yăn avōn lan căm bō dăi . . .

*

Basically, as in all primitive areas where the degree of literacy is extremely low, the tradition in Lao literature, as it evolved from its beginnings in song and magical incantation, through the mnemonic discipline of Buddhist teaching, to its classical period

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of lyric and epic poetry, has always been an oral one, handed on from one generation to the next by traveling minstrels and local singers as well as by the Buddhist monks. Far from changing this tradition, the coming of Buddhism actually strengthened it, as a result of the Buddhist aversion to the written word as an unreliable and inadequate medium in which to express the "truth."

Unfortunately, this oral tradition, together with the innumerable invasions and immensely destructive wars that were constantly being fought on Lao soil, and the extreme inaccuracy of the priestly transcriptions (which were frequently copied and recopied by monk-scribes whose only qualification for the work was an elegant handwriting, and who did not hesitate to alter the text in any way they saw fit for reasons of propriety or theology), has resulted in it now being quite impossible to establish with any degree of certainty the date of original composition or even the author of any literary text. (The single exception to this in Lao classical literature is the Sin Xai*; and even here all that is really known is the name of its author, Pang Kham.)*

In addition to the Pāli-Lao Tripitaka *texts, and their subsequent giant influence on Lao poetry, the introduction of Buddhism was also directly responsible for the writing of the first Lao works that can properly be called history (as opposed to purely legendary material, a great deal of which is included in the body of oral literature which pre-dates the advent of Buddhism)—the so-called Lao "Chronicles." These histories of the reigns of the Lao kings, which were begun under Chao Sam Sen Tai (1373-1416), the son and heir of Fa Ngoum, despite the dubiety of much of their content, contain the only even semi-accurate historical record that has survived of the 400-year period from the 14th through the 17th centuries. And even these can only be judged now on the basis of copies dating from the last half of the 18th century, all of the originals having been either lost or destroyed.*

*

At the same time as the "Chronicles" were being written, the excitement engendered by the new philosophy and the new possibilities for poetic form that were revealed in the Pāli-Lao transcriptions began to result in a new kind of lyric poetry: richer in

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musical structure, more complex in feeling and meaning. The magical incantations of the shaman and the simple songs of work and love and death of the common people did not, of course, die out completely, but they did undergo a considerable revitalization and heightening at the hands of the new poets of the court and pagoda. In the popular "Song of Mahāxay," for example, the Indian influence, with its moral and gnostic concern overlaying the native Lao animistic impetus, is clearly discernible:

O banyan with beautiful leaves
A bird will make his house
In your shadow

What do you say?
Perhaps it will be a starling
The color of a mackerel

Will you make room for him
In the windy world of your branches?
Or are you afraid
That he will eat your fruit?

He will be eating his own heart
And will not disturb
Your vegetable silence

If you touch him with your fingers
You will be touching yourself

Like yours, my heart
Is most difficult of access
And desperately repels me

*

Like the lyric, the native Lao tradition of fables and popular tales (which existed long before the coming of Buddhism) also underwent a significant change as the new ideas imported from Ceylon began to make themselves felt throughout the country. Although in many instances this change consisted of no more than the addition to the original story of merely ornamental and pious references to the Buddha, frequently it seems to have resulted in the entire moral basis of the tale undergoing a considerable shift of emphasis: from one rooted solely in the old animistic beliefs to one which clearly reflects the new Buddhist ideas. The

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most important additives to these tales were the doctrines of Karma (the just retribution for good and bad actions) and Reincarnation—both of which were taken over bodily from the later Hindu Vedic philosophy by the Buddhists.

In such popular Lao tales as "The Phi Kong Koi," "The Tale of the Jar," "The Two Sparrows," "The Tale of the Green Lemons," etc., the idea of Karma, operating over a cycle of past, present and future lives, is the real nucleus around which the story revolves. Each action, however small or seemingly unimportant, has its reaction—if not in one life, then in another. Good is ultimately rewarded with good, and evil with evil. This doctrine, although essentially simple in concept, in practice results in an extremely complex structural fabric against which the narrative in these tales unfolds. Nothing is viewed as occurring in isolation. For all practical purposes, life is endless, and everything that lives is endlessly and inextricably bound up with everything else, for good or ill. Again, as in the lyric poems, the Hindu and specifically Buddhist ideas and concepts which suffuse these fables and tales do not supplant or detract from the animistic bias native to Laos; but rather add to it, extending its meaning and giving it a weight and subtlety not present before.

In addition to these changes in what was essentially native material, the body of Lao prose fiction was also hugely augmented and enriched from the 14th century onwards by the hundreds of entirely new tales and stories and legends, of Indian and Singhalese origin, which the early monks brought with them. These fall into two basic categories: those which are non-canonical and largely of pre-Buddhist origin; and the semi-canonical parables and fables dealing with the various incarnations of the Buddha before he reached enlightenment. Of all the Buddhist material, sacred or profane, this collection of 547 Jātakas, or tales of the Bodhisattva at various stages on his million-year progress towards Buddhahood, contributed most to the subsequent development of Lao literature; and especially to the crowning achievement of that literature: the long narrative-heroic poem, which M. Nhouy Abhay has called the myth-epic.

•

The Jātaka, a Sanscrit word which translates literally as

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"birth story," was originally developed in India and Ceylon as a result of a movement within the Buddhist religious community to combat the tendency towards exclusiveness which had grown up among the monks, and to encourage a larger participation in Buddhist thinking and practices on the part of the general populace. In essence, the Jātaka is a parable tale about one of the former lives of the Buddha, designed primarily for a popular audience. Its main purpose was to express for the average man, in terms which he could understand, the general moral virtues[1] *and the inexorable laws of Karma and Rebirth, which concerned him more directly and immediately than the more fundamental (but also more abstract and difficult) teachings of Buddhism. From the beginning, the Jātakas seem to have lived up to their purpose and achieved enormous popularity, stimulating the imagination of the laity and binding them more closely in loyalty to the Buddhist order.*

When they reached Laos in the mid-14th century, the Jātakas very quickly became the most popular of all the Pāli-Lao bilingual texts. As a result of this popularity, by the end of the century a number of works either imitating or based on the Jātaka form, but also incorporating a certain amount of native material, expanding the narrative, and adding heroic mythological and legendary detail from both Indian and Lao sources, had been composed by Lao poets. Although, again, due to the lack of original texts, it is impossible to judge these early Lao attempts at the epic manner on their own terms, from existing copies of such surviving works as the Champa Siton, *the* Boud-dhasen *and the* Ousāparot *it would appear that they were on the whole relatively clumsy in style, and largely didactic and repetitive in content.*

During the course of the next three centuries, as Lao prosody developed in sophistication and strength as a result of the influence of the Pāli-Lao texts and the new Buddhist ideas, more

[1] *These are usually given in the form of five basic commandments: to abstain from injury to living things; from taking that which is not given; from unchastity; from false speech; and from intoxicants as tending to cloud the mind. Five additional commandments are added to these specifically for the monk aspiring towards Buddhahood: to abstain from eating after noon; from dancing, singing, music and stage plays; from adorning the body with garlands, perfumes and cosmetics; from using a high or large bed; and from the accepting of gold or silver. The ten together are known as "The Ten Precepts of the Lord Buddha."*

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and more poets tried their hands at the Jātaka form, manipulating, adding to, and gradually changing it from the rather simple parable tale invented by the early monks for the benefit of the Buddhist laity, to something more akin to the pre-Buddhist Indian heroic sagas and epic poems. Myth and legend, of both Lao and Indian origin, were increasingly interwoven with the central Bodhisattva story; new characters were added out of the native Lao tradition of stories and popular tales; and the old animistic imagery native to Laos was used more and more extensively to help clothe the traditionally rather bare bones of the Jātaka parable.

Finally, during the period of approximately 150 years from the reign of Setthāthirat (1534-1571) to that of Souligna Vongsa (1637-1694), the centuries of experimentation with the Jātaka form reached their greatest culmination in such anonymous myth-epics as the Kalaket, *the* Mahāvet, *the* Xien Mien, *the* Thao Be, *etc., and, most popular of all, the* Sin Xai *of Pang Kham.*

*

Stripped to its essentials, the Sin Xai *still remains a Jātaka. Its basic story is that of a Bodhisattva, an earlier heroic incarnation of a Buddha, passing through one of the stages on his way towards enlightenment. Its main protagonists are the Bodhisattva-hero, Sin Xai, and Mara, the "Evil One," here represented in both superhuman and human form by Koum Phan and the five younger princes respectively. In his struggles with the Evil One, the Bodhisattva-hero is assisted by Providence, represented by Pra-in (Sanscrit: Indra). The meaning of the poem revolves around the twin doctrines of Karma and Rebirth. Essentially, it is still a parable concerning the nature of suffering, and the steps which must be taken in order to achieve its cessation.*

Although, however, Pang Kham took the Jātaka as his basic model, and retained many of the traditional elements of the form, there all resemblance to the simple parable tales brought to Laos by the early monks ceases. In contrast to the spare, simple prose of the Pāli tales, the language of the Sin Xai*—infused with the earth-loving animistic imagery native to Laos, its rhythms intensified and complicated as a result of the experience of the*

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Pāli-Lao bi-lingual texts, its meaning expanded and deepened by an extraordinarily effective mixture of Hindu cosmology, sophisticated Buddhist philosophy and Lao myth and legend—is intricate, musical, elaborately allusive:

Mu'a năn sĭn xăi tao toṅ thlêṅ hlai vat
Pŭn dăṅ thôṅ thieo xon xom xu suak sne
Căo ni mi phua lu lu' yiṅ pōi pak ku (naṅ ho'i)
Hiem kai hu bon baṅ bok ma (tieo to't)

This is poetry designed primarily as a public entertainment. It is meant to be sung or chanted, as it still is today, to the accompaniment of bamboo flutes, pipes, xylophones and stringed instruments, at Lao religious festivals. Its methodology is mnemonic, hypnotic, and if it is meant to teach, like its model, then what it teaches is something much more complex and ambivalent than anything attempted in the Jātakas.

Instead of simply telling his readers that Sin Xai is a Bodhisattva, for example, as was customary in the Jātakas, Pang Kham indicates this symbolically, within the fabric of the poem itself. To any Buddhist, the signs which, scattered throughout, serve to identify Sin Xai as a Bodhisattva, would be quite unmistakable. There is not sufficient space to go into all of these here, but one in particular seems to me especially interesting and important in relationship to the underlying symbolism and imagery of the poem. This has to do with the concept of the Buddha in his "glorified body," which is sometimes also expressed as "the enjoyment body" or the "body which expresses the Buddha's own true nature." The Buddha's "glorified body," hidden beneath the ordinary flesh of his human form and visible only to the eye of faith, was 18 feet high; golden in color; did not suffer from the physical limitations of an ordinary body; was always crowned with the Ushnisha (literally "turban," a kind of cowl on the head); and radiated light constantly:

> *Around the body of the Buddha there is always a light, a fathom wide on all sides, which shines constantly day and night, as brilliantly as a thousand suns, and resembling a mountain of jewels in movement.*[2]

[2] Edward Conze, *Buddhism: Its Essence and Development* (Faber and Faber, London, 1951), p. 37.

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Although these so-called "marks of a superman" (which Buddhism took over bodily from an earlier Hindu manual of astrology) are ordinarily used to refer to the Buddha after he has reached enlightenment, it was reasonable to suppose that the Bodhisattvas also possessed them to some extent. Thus, at the beginning of Book Two of the Sin Xai, *the description of the hero in Sections 2 and 3 immediately mark him as one ultimately destined to achieve Buddhahood:*

> *. . . standing in his golden skin, anyone could tell he was likely to outdazzle even the sun. . . . For how could they envy him whose eyes opened like a book of light wherein all who looked must read, not his, but their own histories intensified, so that to read there was to become, in some part, a god?*

Later, when Koutsālat comes to the exiles' palace in the wilderness, he finds Sin Xai "restored to life by Pra-In, his golden body sheathed in a great light and blazing as with a thousand thousand jewels." And, if this were not enough, to make it quite plain to anyone reading the poem exactly who Sin Xai is meant to represent, the poet adds the incident of the Ushnisha, the "royal turban of gold and silver threads" which Soumountha leaves on the cliff-edge, and which later serves first to identify the hero ("behold, the god is come again into his own country"), and then to crown him in the concluding section of the poem:

> *And they put on him the royal turban of gold and silver threads, and the loin-cloth of gold leather, that had belonged to a god. And it was fitting, for he had shown without doubt that he had the true blood of God in him.*

Similarly, a Buddhist reader of the poem would have little difficulty in recognizing Koutsālat—who "observed the Ten Precepts of the Lord Buddha," for whom "the world was a wheel and he was its axis," and whose "long suffering led him to wisdom"—as both an anterior Bodhisattva and a type of the "Wheel-Turning King" referred to in the Divyavādana *(548-9):*

> *He is victorious at the head of his troops; just; a king of Dharma (doctrine). . . . He will have 100 sons, brave and beautiful heroes, destroyers of the enemy's armies. He will conquer the whole wide earth to the limits of the ocean, and then he will remove from it all the causes of tyranny and misery.*

*

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The use of the wheel as a symbol of continuity, perpetuation, life, fortune, the seasons, etc., seems to be almost as old as its invention as a practical device, and very nearly as universal. For Hindu thinking especially, with its emphasis on the doctrines of Karma and Reincarnation, it seemed to provide a convenient method of illustrating, in simple graphic terms which could be easily understood by everyone, the continuous, self-perpetuating cycle of birth and death and rebirth which for them was the essence of existence.

When Buddhism made its appearance, it quite naturally took over the symbol along with the doctrines it illustrated. Thus, in the Buddhacarita *(12.1), the Bodhisattva, meditating on "the successive series of his former births," and on those of all living creatures, thinks to himself:*

> *Again and again they must leave the people they regard as their own, and must go elsewhere, and that without ever stopping. Surely this world is unprotected and helpless, and like a wheel it turns round and round.*

His conclusion, the reaching of which in itself signified his enlightenment and Buddhahood, was that the only way to escape from "the wheel of becoming" was to "turn the wheel of the doctrine"—i.e., to comprehend and follow the "Four Holy Truths" concerning the nature of suffering (Ill) and the "holy eight-fold path" which alone leads to its cessation.

Characteristically, Buddhism, with its penchant for looking at all sides of a thing, its delight in the comparison and interrelationship of seeming opposites, uses the very symbol which stands for the ills of the world to describe the process by which escape from those ills is possible. Similarly, the concept of homelessness, which is equated with the suffering world in the passage from the Buddhacarita *quoted previously, is also, for opposite reasons, prescribed as a necessary state for the Buddhist monk aspiring to become a Bodhisattva. His life is described as "the homeless life," and in order to enter upon it he had to "leave the home, filled with faith."*

In the Sin Xai, *Pang Kham has taken both of these central Buddhist doctrines and used them as essential elements in the building of his poem. The basic structure of the* Sin Xai *is, in fact, circular. The narrative ends where it began, moving in a series of*

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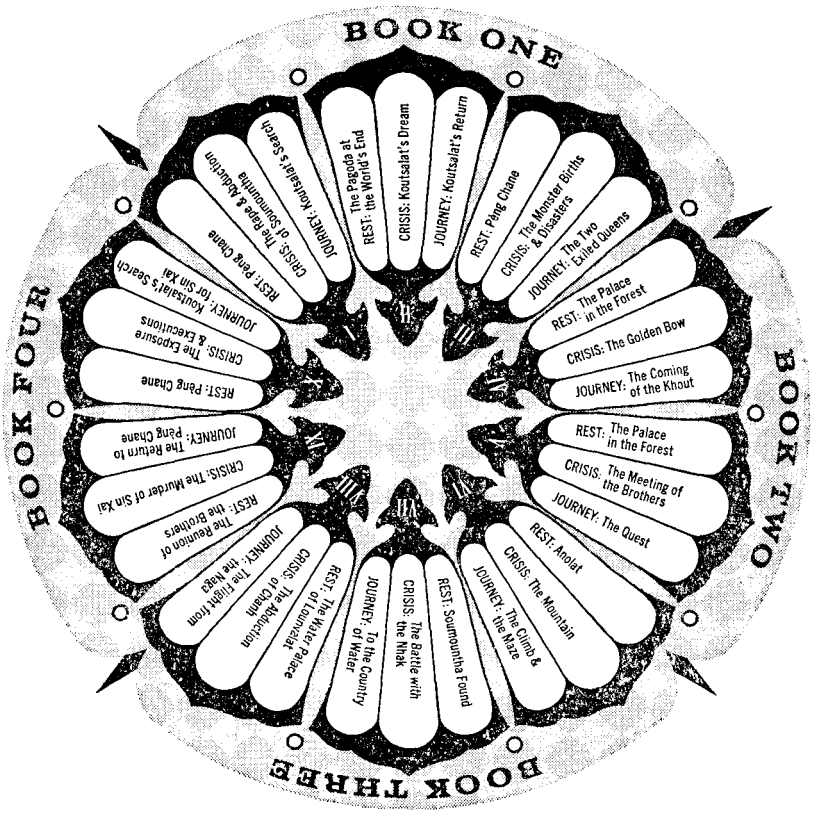
interlocking triads: a period of rest, interrupted by a crisis, which leads in turn to a journey, at the end of which there is another period of rest interrupted by another crisis leading to another journey, etc. In this way, the entire poem revolves around itself like the intricately carved spokes of a giant wheel:


BOOK ONE
REST: The Pagoda at the World's End
CRISIS: Koutsalat's Dream
JOURNEY: Koutsalat's Return
REST: Pang Chane
CRISIS: The Monster Births & Disasters
JOURNEY: The Two Exiled Queens
BOOK TWO
REST: The Palace in the Forest
CRISIS: The Golden Bow
JOURNEY: The Coming of the Khout
REST: The Palace in the Forest
CRISIS: The Meeting of the Brothers
JOURNEY: The Quest
REST: Anolet
CRISIS: The Mountain
JOURNEY: The Climb & the Maze
BOOK THREE
REST: Soumountha Found
CRISIS: The Battle with the Nhak
JOURNEY: To the Country of Water
REST: The Water Palace of Lounsalar
CRISIS: The Abduction of Chanti
JOURNEY: The Flight from the Nagz
REST: The Reunion of the Brothers
CRISIS: The Murder of Sin Xai
JOURNEY: The Return to Pang Chane
REST: Pang Chane
CRISIS: The Exposure & Executions
JOURNEY: Koutsalat's Search for Sin Xai
REST: Pang Chane
CRISIS: The Rape & Abduction of Soumountha
JOURNEY: Koutsalat's Search
BOOK FOUR

And, of course, that is exactly what it is: one enormous, complex symbol standing for both the wheel of change and mortality and the wheel of the doctrine, the homeless path of the suffering world and the eight-fold path of the Bodhisattva on his way towards Nirvana—the whole woven together by the inexorable laws of Karma and Rebirth; illuminated, as it were, by the native, earth-worshipping imagery of Laos; and cast in the form of an adventure story intended specifically for public performance as a poetic and musical entertainment.

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To my knowledge, this is the first time the Sin Xai *has been rendered into English. For the version printed here, I have followed the precedent of centuries of Southeast Asian writing by making, not a "translation" in any of the ordinary senses of the word, but something more closely resembling a set of variations on the original—suggested by, rather than deriving from it. Although I have retained the main narrative movement of the poem as it is given in the Lao sources, I have rearranged some of the sequences slightly to suit my own ear, added a good deal of new material by way of expansion and elaboration on existing themes, and omitted entirely some episodes which I felt to be extraneous. (I have not included, for example, the long sequence of 15 sections called "The Complaint of Lounvālat," which closes the poem in most of the Lao versions. Despite its own intrinsic interest and even considerable beauty, this sequence is not in keeping with either the symmetry or the style of the first four books, seems to both the editors and myself rather anti-climactic, and probably also represents the work of another and later poet.) Since it would obviously be impossible to duplicate or even approximate in English the complex metrics and elaborate contrapuntal structure of classical Lao poetry, after a great deal of experimentation it finally seemed to me that the poem would lend itself best to treatment as a sort of modified prose poem, with narrative and lyric interwoven in irregularly stressed cadences somewhat after the manner of the King James Gospels.*

My basic source—the "original" on which this particular set of variations is based—is M. Thao Nhouy Abhay's abbreviated French prose translation published first in an issue of France-Asie *(Tome XII, mars-avril-mai, 1956) devoted to Laos, and later reprinted in* Aspects du Pays Lao *(Editions Comité Lao, Saigon, 1956). Other sets of variations, in both Thai and Cambodian, have been published (usually without reference to the Lao original), and a French translation of the Cambodian version was included in A. Pavie's* Les Contes du Cambodge *(Leroux, Paris, 1921). The principal Lao prose and verse manuscript versions are preserved in the* Ha sip sat (Fifty Lives) *collection of the Bibliothèques des Pagodes Siamoises et Lao.*

In order to appreciate fully all of the complex symbolism and meanings of the Sin Xai, *it is obviously necessary to have a fairly*

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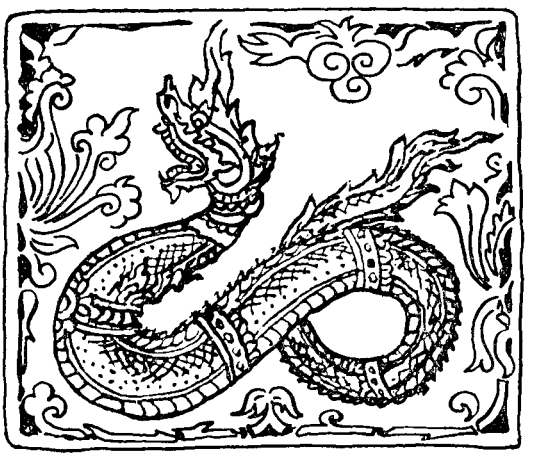
thorough grounding in Buddhist literature and thought, as well as in Indian and Lao mythology. My own knowledge of these is still, I am sorry to say, very limited, but I would recommend as a starting point for those who may be interested in pursuing the matter further Dr. Conze's brilliant and illuminating study of Buddhism already quoted, as well as his Buddhist Scriptures *(Penguin Classics, London, 1959); Mr. Christmas Humphreys'* The Wisdom of Buddhism *(Michael Joseph, London, 1960); Mr. K. M. Sen's* Hinduism *(Penguin, London, 1961); and Mr. Lin Yutang's* The Wisdom of China and India *(Random House, New York, 1942).*

I am grateful to Mrs. Helen Astarita for her help in preparing the wheel diagram for this introduction, as well as for her work in adapting for reproduction from their original Lao sources the mythological drawings printed with the poem.

The Sin Xai

after the Lao of Pang Kham



Book One

1. IN THE TIME WHEN THE YEARS of Our Lord Buddha were accomplished, and the world was alive with light, there was, off

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a distant coast, an island, called Pèng Chane. There, among its great trees, glittered 10,000 granaries, warehouses of ivory and jade and fine linen; and high on its soft red hills rode marvelous palaces, with wind in all their sails, and delicate houses shaped like bells, inhabited by a race of dancers.

2. The ruler of this country, the Phaya Koutsālat, was much in love with gods and men. He practiced the Instructions of the Blessed, and on every eighth day observed the Ten Precepts of the Lord Buddha. At ease in his skin, in his peaceable kingdom, the Phaya, richer than any wishes, desired for nothing more than that which he had already. Each morning, his ministers assembled to discuss the affairs of the state; the merchants crowded the public squares with their goods, and the brown rivers with their gilded boats; and, in the evenings, the bird-calls of flutes and cymbals summoned the yellow monks to prayer.

3. One joy for the Phaya surpassed all others, and this was his only sister, the Nang Soumountha; for she was surely the surest love of his life, sweeter to him than the wild plum that grows only in the wind's places, in the mountain's high weather. With her, the Phaya divided the whole of his kingdom; and these two had no secrets from one another.

4. At this same time, in Anōlat, a country remoter than any star, there lived a solitary Nhak, whose name was Koum Phan, and who was one of the wisest of all the Nhak. Although Koum Phan lived like a king, surrounded by his subjects and servants, in truth he lived alone, entirely to himself. Each morning he would sit mourning on his doorstep for the Unknown who was to be the darling, and the despair of his life. Because of his talents, her face was always before him. He would look into her eyes, which for him were not merely mirrors, but rooms and landscapes, in which he could see the beginning and the end; and he could tell there also how and when her days would be accomplished. With one green finger, Koum Phan wrote her name in the sand, where it bloomed like a garden: *Nang Soumountha!*

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5. Then, one day, Koum Phan, knowing that the time had come for certain things to be concluded, sat back against his doorstep, and let himself be overcome with passion, and by his obscure arts came to Pèng Chane. There, beaked and gorgeously feathered, like a great bird of prey, he took Soumountha, and ravished her in front of all the people, and carried her away tucked under one wing. And all the birds, beasts, trees that for her grace and beauty did her accord were struck dumb after weeping. And the sounds of outrage clattered louder than the wind in the trees.

6. Muses! And you, gods and demigods of the four horizons, come now to my aid in this telling of the despair of the Phaya, Koutsālat, bereft of his beloved sister.

7. As he watched the Nhak sail up, and into the enormous East, beating his burning wings, life for Koutsālat ceased to have meaning. His island, that had been for him the original garden, turned wilderness, and bitter. The fruit rotted in the orchards. In the vineyards, the wine soured in the skins of the grapes. His house was as empty as his heart.

8. And so Koutsālat turned his back to his people, and gave up his throne to his first wife, and put on the yellow robes of a monk, and set out by himself to look for his sister.

9. The journey was long, the sea full of storms and wonders, the sky shipwrecked on strange beaches, the coasts bleached white as bone, the jungles burned into autumn, the roads unknown and difficult, the rice-paddies barren, the villages conjured whole out of the rock in desperation, the cities full of strangers. For three long years, Koutsālat walked through the world, looking neither to the right nor to the left, but straight ahead, at some distant thing.

10. Until, in one burning summer, he came to a pagoda at the end of the road, and stopped walking. Behind the pagoda, which was already crumbling, the jungle was an impenetrable wall of green all the way to the horizon. Here, he had been told, was the

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final boundary of the world permitted to men. He could go no farther. He had come to the end, and had found nothing. He lay at the edge of the road and slept.

11. When Koutsālat awoke, it was morning. The world was all in sun's color, but for him it was the ultimate color of despair. Even the trees were in mourning. And in mourning also the seven sisters who came then out of the ruined pagoda with their arms full of alms: rice in brass bowls, prawns steamed in dry water, wheat-cakes and wild honey. Koutsālat, who had come from the beginning to the end, and who had found nothing in all that distance, looked now at the seven sisters standing before him, each more beautiful than the next, and fell instantly and completely in love.

12. As he looked into the seven faces dazzling in all their youth before him, a dream struck him. The whole world turned around him. The world was a wheel and he was its axis. That which had been white became black, and black became white. For Koutsālat, the end became the beginning; for he knew now the way to his beloved Soumountha.

13. With all haste, the Phaya returned to his kingdom. And the jungle bloomed on either side of the road, with strange flowers. The bees make constant ceremony in their courts of honey, and the elephant walked out with the tiger. Serpents with gold scales slithered across his path to make an omen. A peacock glittered on a hillside; its thousand eyes spoke a thousand colors; and, once, he thought he saw a rainbow wrap its tail around a mountain.

14. And so the Phaya, Koutsālat, came again to Pèng Chane, and presented himself to his first wife, who had been regent in his absence. And he took off his monk's robes, and put on the dress of a king. From his high throne, he directed his first wife to summon his ministers and chief priests and all his other wives before him. When these had been assembled, the Phaya spoke to them from the throne, and said he would take the seven sisters from the ruined pagoda at the world's end to wife; and that from

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these he would be given a son, of great courage, surpassing in beauty, wiser than the wisest men in his kingdom. And he told them that this son would succeed where he had failed, and would find the Nang Soumountha, and wrest her from Koum Phan, and return her to Pèng Chane from the winged house of the Nhak.

15. And so it was. Messengers set out at once with trains of gifts: tapestries woven of sunlight, cages of topaz and ruby birds, boxes of sandalwood containing jewels, sweet bruised fruits, intricate perfumes, medallions of hammered gold and copper, amulets and talismans. And the messengers were received with good welcome at the pagoda at the end of the world. And the seven sisters returned with them to Pèng Chane, where they were married to the Phaya Koutsālat with much festivity and general rejoicing.

16. The seven sisters, now queens, with seven identical thrones, sat on either side of the Phaya their husband, and were waited upon by all of the Phaya's other wives, as their handmaidens. In the mornings, at noon and at evening, at first, middle and last light, the seven queens made offerings, and appealed to all the known and unknown gods that they might be blessed with the son desired by the Phaya; for they knew that Koutsālat would surely elevate to the highest position whichever of them should give him his desire. And, each day, the Phaya lay with each of the seven in turn, that this might be accomplished.

17. Two queens, the Nang Chantha and the Nang Là, were almost at once visited with favorable dreams; but in their zeal they must have managed to arouse the jealousy of heaven, for the court astrologers in unison predicted that these two queens would bring forth monsters. And indeed, after her time, the Nang Chantha was delivered of twins: a boy spiraled and soft as a snail, and a boy whose head was like an elephant's, with gold tusks. So too, in her turn, the Nang Là delivered up into the world a magnificent gold-skinned boy, already fully armed with bow and arrows. And these names were given them: Sang Thong, or "Golden Snail"; Sihālat, which means "Elephant"; and Sin Xai, which means "He Who Will Triumph by His Virtues."

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18. Immediately after these strange births, the country was visited with a number of disasters. Houses toppled like falling trees at the least breath of wind. Everywhere men and beasts were struck down by sudden lightning. A blight killed the rice still in its seed; and even the ships at sea took fire in their sails, and were lost, with all their hands and cargoes. Still full of love for his other five wives, all of whom by this time were heavy with children, Koutsālat ordered the immediate exile of the Nang Chantha and the Nang Là. And so they departed into grief, with their monstrous children in their arms, followed by the sorrow and compassion of all the people.

19. For several years, the two exiled queens wandered in the wilderness with their children: over mountains and down into valleys; at night slept cold under thin starlight; in the mornings woke to the shrieking of monkeys and gibbons; fed on dry husks and wild spices, nutmeg and cinnamon, bitter roots and the remains of birds and beasts murdered and left by the roadside. Years passed, and were forgotten, as they had been forgotten by their husband, and his people.

20. Finally, in desperation, the two queens prayed on their bony knees like two skeletons to Pra-In, All-Powerful, King of the Old Gods. For themselves, they asked nothing but death and an end to their suffering, and for their children only the barest subsistence. And Pra-In by his mercy heard them, and with one flick of his wrist created before them an astonishment, a wonder: a marvelous palace, with its roof in the trees and its foundations cut in deep rock; and with this legend inscribed over the doorway: "This is the house set apart for the sons of God."

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Book Two

1. YEARS PASSED, AND IN THE secret heart of the forest the three strange brothers grew up into strength and beauty, waxing with each successive weather more graceful and more intelligent.

2. By the time they had reached their ninth year, the twins, Sihālat and Sang Thong, were already in their different ways as superior to anyone their age as most men are to monkeys; and, excellent as these two were, their half-brother, Sin Xai, was even more. Almost from the beginning he had been without equal anywhere in the world; and now, in his ninth year, standing in his golden skin, anyone could tell he was likely to outdazzle even the sun.

3. When Sin Xai slept, the world slept with him, wrapped in leaves. When he walked, whole landscapes and lithe countries moved like a music under his skin; and when he ran, it was like a summer wind in the trees. And yet, although he stood a full measure taller than either of his brothers, although his hair was blacker, his teeth whiter, and his skin the true color of gold, they were not jealous. For how could they envy him whose eyes opened

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like a book of light wherein all who looked must read, not his, but their own histories intensified, so that to read there was to become, in some part, a god?

4. One day, in the middle of his ninth summer, Sin Xai came to his mother where she sat dreaming under a jackfruit tree, and demanded of her the bow and arrows with which he had come, armed, into his life. In spite of his youth, he drew the great bow without difficulty, and aimed it at the sky. The bow twanged at his touch with a sound like all the bow-strings in the world singing together; so that, out of the sky's heart, where the sun rode silently, remotely on its own mysterious business, there were premonitions of thunder.

5. When the arrow sailed up, it did not stop until it had outdistanced the very air, and penetrated into the heart of the sky, which is also the country of great birds, the divine Khout. The king of this country, the Phaya Simphali, had many years before given himself, with all of his subjects and possessions, entirely into the service of God. So, now, when the golden arrow tumbled down at his feet, like a thunderbolt returned to its source, he recognized it immediately; and at once gathered together all of his people to witness and pay homage to the sign of the All-Powerful, Pra-In, King of the clear air, best and greatest of gods.

6. And so it was that the nations of birds, led by the Phaya Simphali on his white wings, came again after long absence to the world of men. Beating down out of the sky, they descended in all their winged flocks and phantoms on the exiles' palace in the forest, and came to Sin Xai where he still stood with his bow in his hands, and knelt before him, and offered their services to help sweeten his exile.

7. Again, years passed, and the three brothers continued to grow in their gifts and talents, and in their love and admiration for each other. With the aid of the Khout, they made friends of all the inhabitants of the forest, and even became acquainted with those most remote and inaccessible of all creatures: the spirits of the river, of the wild springs and waterfalls, and those who live

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only in caves, and those who inhabit the smoke on the top of the mountains.

8. During all this time, in Pèng Chane, the Phaya Koutsālat never ceased to think of his beloved sister, the Nang Soumountha, and of her ravisher, the Nhak Koum Phan. When the sons of his remaining five queens from the pagoda at the end of the world had reached their thirteenth year, Koutsālat could contain his impatience no longer. Summoning his five sons before him, he spoke to them severely from his high throne, and reminded them of the reason for their existence. He spoke of the long years already wasted on the wheel of becoming, and commanded them to begin their preparations immediately to find Soumountha and destroy Koum Phan. So, reluctantly, the five young princes gave up the soft employments and jeweled pastimes of the court, and ventured forth from Pèng Chane, already despairing; for who that was merely human could be expected to accomplish such a mission?

9. For three months, the princes wandered in the endless forests on the mainland. Finally, at their wits' end, their soft limbs ripped to tatters, their bodies shrunken from lack of food and water, their long perfumed hair tangled with briars, trapped in vines, they could go no farther. Even the footfalls of padding beasts in the thickets all around could not arouse them. They lay on their faces where they had fallen in the sharp grass, and slept.

10. When they awoke, it was evening. All around them the shadows growing longer rustled and swayed like dancers; or, taking the sudden shape of a beast or a bird, lumbered or darted under the thick-leaved trees. Then, still half-asleep, they thought they heard voices in the distance, barely heard under the wind's singing. Rousing themselves with great difficulty, they set out again, without a word, towards the distant sound. This grew steadily louder as they stumbled through the vines, until suddenly they could hear it quite clearly: a choir of wings, a palaver of beaks and talons. Then, as strangely as it had begun, the sound stopped. Despairing, the five princes made one last effort. Plunging through the green wall before them, they came into

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the middle of a clearing, cut, as if from stone, out of the forest's heart.

11. So, for the first time in any of their lives, all the sons of Koutsālat out of the pagoda at the world's end were brought together. Standing before their older brother, Sin Xai, who was sitting on a fallen tree, flanked by Sihālat and Sang Thong and surrounded by the shadowy Khout, the five princes were at first struck dumb with wonder. But Pra-In, who still guides men's destinies, whispered his name in their ears; and so the princes knelt before him, and greeted him as brother and peer, and recounted to him their history.

12. After listening to their story, Sin Xai gave good welcome to his brothers, and saw that their needs were attended to, and set aside a day for festivity and general rejoicing in the palace at the secret heart of the forest. But, now that he had learned the true reason for his existence, Sin Xai was impatient to be on his way. In spite of the protests of his mother and his aunt, therefore, by dawn on the third day after the young princes' arrival all eight brothers were already deep in the thickest part of the jungle, following the path which Sin Xai knew from a dream must finally lead them to the winged house of the Nhak.

13. Some hours later, turning a bend in the path, the brothers came suddenly upon a huge serpent, from whose open mouth ripe flames flickered dizzily, barring the way. At this, the five younger princes were terrified, and turned to run away; but Sin Xai stood taller than ever, and put his hands on his brothers' shoulders to reassure them. Taking up his great bow, he loosed against the serpent one of his golden arrows, which flew like a homing bird directly into that gaping mouthful of fires, and smashed the giant head into fragments. From these, however, seven new heads sprouted immediately, each spitting fire and belching smoke. Again Sin Xai drew his bow, and this time, with a rain of arrows, severed all seven heads entirely from the serpent's body. When the heads rolled on the ground, Sihālat jumped forward, and with his ivory tusks cut them into a hundred pieces. And so, at last, the serpent, although it still burned like

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all the fires in hell, was rendered impotent, incapable of any new and perhaps even more spectacular growth.

14. Their first battle won, the eight brothers continued on their way, pushing ever deeper into the forest. At night, the five younger princes slept always in the biggest tree they could find, while Sin Xai, who by this time had forgotten even the need for sleep, so completely had his quest been put upon him, paced impatiently up and down under them—until, at first light, after a meal of wild berries and honey, the journey was once again resumed.

15. After several days of this travel, the brothers came suddenly out of the trees and onto a shore where the path ended before a sea that was fully nine miles wide and so deep that there was no blue or green in its color, but only an impenetrable black, like that on the underside of a poison-leaf, or a young bat's wing. Again, the five princes lost heart, and protested that they could go no farther; and again Sin Xai reassured them. For how, he said, can any true god's son abandon in mid-course a task which he has undertaken?

16. For three days and nights the brothers camped on the beach, staring at the black sea before them, unable to think of a way to cross it and so continue their journey. Then, on the morning of the fourth day, Sin Xai went off alone to speak to Sang Thong where he lay resting, curled under a fallen tree. Very soon after this, Sang Thong came down to the sea's edge, and, rearranging his strange body into the shape of a boat, launched himself onto the black water. Immediately, Sin Xai embarked in his brother, and commanded the others to follow; but by this time the five princes were so terrified they could not be persuaded to move. With great reluctance, therefore, Sin Xai left the five fearful princes to await his return; and with them, as guardian, he left also his beloved half-brother and sharer of his exile, Sihālat.

17. On the black sea's farther shore, even the sand was black, and the jungle extended, more black than green, without any

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discernible path or opening, as far as the two brothers could see. From its depths, muted echoes continually sounded, though no wind stirred the heavy leaves. Surely, Sin Xai told himself, here must originate the lost calls of Thanis, and that dark music to which all men must come, in the end. And still he did not lose heart, but followed steadily behind Sang Thong, who, once again in his own true shape, pushed onward, felling trees, to cut a road through the jungle.

18. Towards the distant mountains slowly turning gold in the falling light, between the roots of strange trees, under the swarms of birds and insects that shot as silently as arrows through the heavy air and buried themselves like nails in whatever they could find, Sin Xai followed the road his brother cut. More and more, as he moved along the edge of the world, and up into horizon, into the heart's own country, he was possessed of a strange melancholy. For how could these paths, which seemed so brief and tenuous to the eye, come to any certain end?

19. In this state, bemused, hardly knowing or caring where the road led, Sin Xai walked steadily on. With the aid of his brother, who said nothing, but who was always there, just ahead, he crossed seven seas, each wider by nine miles than the one before it. And always the dangers increased with every halt he made. And then it began to seem to him that some action, some obscure but spectacular event, was always just about to begin; so that it was not here and now through which he walked, but a dissolving world of memories, knee-deep in dreams: of Nhaks and demons whose eyes spun like cartwheels and who dined sweetest on human flesh; of wind-spirits and creatures of the upper slopes, snow-blind and striped like tigers; of the burning mad-women of the desert; of the great bone-litter plains, and the tribes of elephants whose trumpeting made the hills shake and whose footprints were small valleys; of the leaf-eyed women who lived in trees and whose hands were brambles; of the Kinari, winged and claw-footed, sailing out of sleep, speaking his name.

20. At last and so suddenly that for a time it seemed he must still be walking in his sleep, pursued by its inhabitants, Sin Xai

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and Sang Thong crossed the last sea, which was 63 miles wide and surely deeper than the sky; and so entered the kingdom of Koum Phan.

Book Three

1. For seven days and seven nights, Sin Xai lay where he had fallen on the shore of the last sea, and slept. Then, on the morning of the eighth day, he awoke, to find his brother, Sang Thong, whose reserves of energy seemed as inexhaustible as the springs of his heart, still watching patiently beside him. Without speaking, Sang Thong turned and started up the sea-slope behind them. There, as sheer as a wall in the early light, barring the way, a mountain rose up out of the sand to lose itself in cloud somewhere high overhead. This, Sin Xai knew without doubting, must be Anōlat. And so they had come, at last, to the country of Koum Phan.

2. As he stood up, and took his great bow in his hand, and walked slowly up the sea-slope to the foot of the mountain, Sin Xai thought that surely his long sleep must have begun some

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finer change in him; for, with each step, another of the shadowy denizens of his dreams departed, as suddenly and unaccountably as they had come; and even when he stood at the top of the sea-slope, and looked up at the endless mass of rock hanging in the air above him, he was not afraid. Without a pause or backward glance, he mounted astride his brother's back, and together they rode slowly up the face of the cliff.

3. For two days and the night between, Sin Xai and Sang Thong continued to climb. All around them on the face of the cliff stone-lizards scuttled and waved their tongues; and as they rode higher, up into the true country of cloud, where the light ran like water, colonies of eagles launched threats of beak and talon from their nests between the stones.

4. Finally, on the evening of the third day, towards sunset, the two brothers rode up and over the final rim of the cliff, to see, glittering before them in the dying light, a palace, constructed more of air than of earth, holding the sunset like colors in a glass: the winged house of the Nhak!

5. Still without stopping, Sin Xai and Sang Thong rode on, straight for the great carved doors which stood wide open before them. Once inside, they found themselves in an enormous hall, whose walls and ceiling receded backward like horizons, without any perceptible end or beginning. The hall was empty, but everywhere its walls were pierced with doors; and everywhere there were more doors behind them: rooms within rooms in endless succession, and all of them empty of anyone or anything but the last light of the sun.

6. In such a place as this, any ordinary man would have been terrified, lost before he began; but Sin Xai knew that he and his brother could always find their way out again, by simply retracing the glistening snail-track left behind by Sang Thong. And so they went on, ever deeper into the labyrinth of rooms and passages, stairways and towers and cellars, until up and down and left and right were only words whispered to children, with no certain meaning; and direction itself ceased to matter: north,

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east, south and west dissolving one into another, spinning out endlessly in the silver trail behind them.

7. Until, rounding a final corner somewhere high in a tower or deep underground or perhaps halfway between, at what seemed close to the heart of the maze, the brothers came to a single, small doorway, framed in light and elaborately carved; and so found what they had come for.

8. On a high bed in a bamboo cage at the exact center of the room, sat a princess, the cracks and crumples of age beginning to show faintly through her formal mask of rice-powder and jeweled colors, wrapped in silks and gold brocades and surrounded by whistling birds: jackdaws and yellow canaries, parakeets and nightingales, birds of paradise and birds of mourning. As the brothers came riding into the room, the princess did not move, but only stared in astonishment at this strange spectacle; and all the birds took to the air at once, beating their blazing wings against the walls of the cage and screeching loudly.

9. Muses! Gods of air and water, of earth and of ashes, come once again to my aid now in this telling of the joy of the Nang, Soumountha, wrested after so many years from the winged house of the Nhak.

10. As she listened to Sin Xai's account of his adventures, of her brother the Phaya's love for her that was so constant it could reach across bottomless seas and climb a hundred mountains to find her, Soumountha looked at the room outside her bamboo cage, and felt her mask of rice-powder and jeweled colors beginning to crack; and saw that, even here, even now, the world still repeated itself in perpetual blossom; and she saw also that the air had never really stopped singing during all the years of her imprisonment.

11. And so, in this way, the prophecy of Koutsālat was accomplished. Leaving the bamboo cage shattered behind them from one touch of his great bow, Sin Xai climbed with Soumountha onto Sang Thong's broad back; and they rode among whis-

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tling birds back through all the thousand rooms and passages, following the snail-track to the great hall and so out into a morning world flooded with sunlight.

12. After hiding the Nang safely in a grotto just over the edge of the cliff, Sin Xai and Sang Thong returned to the palace; for they knew they could not hope to run quickly enough to escape the wrath of the Nhak, which would surely shake the sky itself when Koum Phan returned home to find Soumountha gone. And so it was. No sooner had they come again to the entrance to the palace than there before them, huger and greener than any tree, stood the ravisher, Koum Phan, King of all the Nhak. Immediately, a sorcery jumped out of his eye, and a dream struck the two brothers. Behind them, the palace burst into flame; and Koum Phan held a hurricane in each fist. To Sin Xai, fixed in the sudden spell, all the half-remembered shadows of his sleep returned, hands and feet clawed like parrots, clutching many knives. But then he shook his head, shedding the spell as a tree sheds leaves, and drew his great bow, and laughed derisively up at Koum Phan; and so the battle commenced.

13. Out of the burning palace poured endless swarms of the Nhak, with ripped and bloody tongues lolling, and fire blossoming at ears, eyes and mouths. When they saw Sin Xai, they were greatly astonished, and laughed to themselves at the spectacle of such a child, scarcely out of his cradle, daring to offer them battle. Then they hurled themselves into the air, and transformed themselves into all sorts of curious beasts, but neither Sin Xai nor Sang Thong were afraid. The brothers stood firm in the face of the attack, and their calm was equalled only by their courage. Sin Xai drew his great bow without ceasing, sending arrow after arrow into the shrieking horde; and Sang Thong was everywhere at once, spinning like a ball, murderous and insatiable, welcoming each new attack like a fond lover.

14. Despite the great toll the brothers took, however, so that the dead lay heaped high all about them, they were only two against a host which seemed to multiply rather than diminish with its dead. Then, when finally it seemed that they must surely

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be overcome, buried under the sheer weight of uncountable numbers of the Nhak, they heard, high above the noise of the battle, a sound as of all the birds in the world singing together. For a moment the fighting ceased, as everyone peered up at the sky in amazement and wonder. In the sudden silence the singing grew steadily louder—until, plummeting down out of the sun, beaks and talons flashing, there came a great company of the Khout, led by the Phaya Simphali on his huge white wings. Falling on the Nhak like hawks on snakes, the Khout slashed and ripped and tore without ceasing, until all the terrible captains of the Nhak were struck down. Finally, Koum Phan himself, using the dead for stepping-stones, came down to meet the golden arrow kept especially for him; and with him fell the last defense of his kingdom.

15. When the brothers had expressed their gratitude and said their farewells to the Khout, who flew off the way they had come, into the eye of the sun, they returned to the grotto where they had left Soumountha; and the three of them made their way back down the cliff. Then, at the request of the Nang, they set off in a new direction: towards the kingdom of water, of the Naga, in order to liberate Soumountha's daughter, the Nang Chanh, who some years before had been given in marriage by Koum Phan to the Phaya Lounvālat, ruler of that country.

16. As they walked, low fields and paddies shimmered all around them. Occasional clumps of young bamboo moved languidly, as though from slow currents underwater; and from their branches strange animals, half snake and half bird, with blue-green and silver scales and fine-webbed wings, called softly to them as they passed. Except for these, however, they saw nothing and no one in all the liquid flat distances around them. Until, after they had been walking for the better part of a day, the watery mists began to thin; and in the sudden wet sunlight they saw before them the river and the water palace of Lounvālat, Lord of the Naga.

17. Because the Phaya, Lounvālat, was a great king, who ruled with justice and propriety over all that country of water which

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lies between the mountains and the sea, he welcomed Soumountha, the mother of his queen, and his queen's cousins, Sin Xai and Sang Thong, with great ceremony; and provided them with every comfort, and gave them the freedom of his country. When he learned that they had come to take the Nang Chanh from him, however, his temper turned; for the Nang was his greatest treasure, worth more to him than all the fine gold and flocks and jade ornaments he possessed; and he knew he could not part from her and continue to live.

18. Since the Phaya had been kind to them, and had had them to dine at his own high table, Sin Xai and Sang Thong did not wish to do him any harm; but Soumountha was adamant, and refused to return to Pèng Chane without her beloved daughter. And she berated Sin Xai in front of his brother for not immediately using his god's gifts to secure the release of the Nang Chanh, and accused him of having turned coward, and would not stop from weeping.

19. At last, in desperation, Sin Xai gave in to his aunt's beseeching, and concocted a ruse by which he hoped to gain possession of the Nang Chanh without having to engage in open warfare with his host. That night, after supper, sitting at the high table with Lounvālat and his chief ministers and courtiers, Sin Xai challenged the Phaya, as a jest, to a drinking contest, which was accepted amidst much joking and general amusement. For many hours, the beakers and flagons were kept continually full to overflowing, and the wine ran like green sap, singing loudly in the veins of the Phaya and all that company. Finally, in the early hours, with his courtiers and ministers drunk and asleep all around him, and only Sin Xai left to still match him, draught for draught, Lounvālat began to nod drowsily, and his eyes glazed, and he too fell asleep with his head in his arms. Immediately thereafter, Sin Xai, staggering under the weight of the wine, came to where the Nang Chanh lay sleeping in another part of the palace. Disregarding her protests, for she was much in love with the Phaya, the young lord of the Wheel took her to where Soumountha and Sang Thong waited outside the palace. And immediately they all rode off on Sang Thong's back, away from

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the sleeping palace of the Naga, back towards the place where they had left Sihālat and the five younger princes waiting on the farther shore of the black sea.

20. The following morning, when Lounvālat awoke from his drunken sleep and found his guests departed, and with them his beloved Chanh, he was consumed with despair. Although he immediately sent off soldiers in pursuit, he knew beforehand that they would be unsuccessful; for who were they to overcome the hero of Anōlat, conqueror of the Nhak, favored of Pra-In? And indeed, when they returned, they were empty-handed. And a shadow came with them, and moved across the country of water. And the jewels of the Naga, which were the lights of their eyes, began to go out, one by one. And the drowned gold lost its lustre. And very soon thereafter, as the watch-fires steamed on the water, and the brown fog arose, announcing disaster, the Phaya, alone in his room, fell into a melancholy which no amusements could assuage; and thence into a strange sickness, from which not even the most famous of his astrologers or physicians were able to rouse him.

Book Four

1. During all this time, on the farther shore of the dead-black

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sea, the five younger sons of Koutsālat grew steadily fatter and sleeker on the wild grapes and game which Sihālat provided for them out of the forest's abundance. Although they did not look forward to the return of Sin Xai, for whom, in their jealousy, they secretly wished only death or disaster, the idle weeks of waiting made them long for anything that should break the monotony. And so they became increasingly more impatient with the world and one another, and spent their time bickering or sulking; and for amusement they took to spitting out insults and imprecations like grape seeds in every direction.

2. So, now, when Sin Xai and the two Nangs, Soumountha and Chanh, came riding in Sang Thong out of the sea, they were met with much excitement and rejoicing; and the celebrations lasted far into the night on the farther shore of the dead-black sea.

3. In a very short time, however, the five younger princes realized that when they should come again to Pèng Chane, Sin Xai would be hero indeed, crowned with vines and flowers, and idolized by all the people; while they would be lucky if they were only scorned and laughed at. And so they began to plot and scheme among themselves, searching for some means of taking for themselves the triumph that was their brother's by right. And their secrets bubbled blackly up inside them, and spilled out onto the ground, like swamp water. And they put on claws in their minds.

4. Very soon after this, the five younger princes, setting off to bathe by themselves in a river they knew of nearby, in the mountains, invited Sin Xai to accompany them. He accepted the invitation gladly, and Sihālat and Sang Thong also went with them. There, in the warm brown shallows, the eight brothers splashed and laughed at their games, playing Touch and Tag-me, and pretending they were fish grown too large for their homes.

5. Suddenly, in the midst of these games, the five younger brothers hoisted Sin Xai onto their shoulders; and laughing and singing a hero's song they carried him out of the river and up onto a precipice that ran along its other side. There, while

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Sihālat and Sang Thong were looking in another direction, squirting themselves and sporting like two curious beasts in the water, the five treacherous princes caught Sin Xai fast by his golden wrists and ankles; and before he knew what they were about hurled him like a stone over the edge of the cliff.

6. As Sin Xai vanished from sight into the cool shadows that lapped at the edge of the cliff, the five princes cried aloud, and tore their hair, and hugely wept, beating their fists against the stones and calling on high heaven to witness the terror of a hero's death.

7. And thus it was that Sihālat, rushing from the river, was persuaded of his brother's death by the tumult of his other brothers' grief; and by so doing lost the power of his elephant's eyes, that once made midnight morning, and cut through solid rock. Despair struck him blind. Black midnight bit his tongue. The shadow opened its mouth, and the dark swallowed him.

8. Although Sang Thong also was at first stricken with grief at the disaster that had befallen them, being calmer by nature, his first thought was to comfort Sihālat. Being also possessed of more faith than many, as well as an inclination towards silence (which is only the other side of truth), he began to question the five princes closely in the midst of their lamenting.

9. Sang Thong's calm and rationality touched his brother Sihālat strongly; so that he came out from the shadows and saw that, whatever had happened, the sun still shone, the leaves still sang, and the water still ran warm in the brown shallows. And Sang Thong spoke to Sihālat then, and said he did not believe that Sin Xai was dead; for how could such an ordinary thing as death happen to one who walked in light, sheltered by the white parasol of God? And so the two brothers, Sihālat and Sang Thong, their faith restored, set off in search of their beloved brother.

10. Immediately after the departure of Sihālat and Sang Thong, the five princes, elated, alight with the delight of evil accomplished, returned to the place where Soumountha and Chanh

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awaited their return. There they recounted to them the circumstances of the unhappy accident of which, they said, their beloved brother, Sin Xai, had been victim. When the two women finally ran out of tears, and their wailing had turned to wondering what should, alas, befall them, now that their protector was dead, the princes urged that they should all leave immediately for Pèng Chane; for what, they said, would be accomplished by waiting longer, since not even an important god could restore green life to the dead?

11. Before she would consent to go, however, the Nang Soumountha insisted that she be taken to the place where the hero had fallen, that she might offer up prayers and supplications for his deliverance. And when they took her, she stood for a long time on the edge of the cliff, looking down into emptiness. And as she left she placed two objects sacred to the old gods under a cairn of stones on the cliff: a royal turban woven of gold and silver threads, and an ancient loin-cloth of gold leather, that had belonged to a god in the days of the world's youth. By these tokens, the princess said, would the hero of Anōlat make himself known, when he should come again into his life.

12. During the journey back to Pèng Chane, which was long and lost, and whose most constant companions were terror and the death of hope, the five princes, borne up by the remembrance of evil, played upon the frayed strings of the women, pretending astonishment at their laments for a dead hero—who, they said, had never existed except in the country of madness and diseased imagination. Were the princesses so loath to return to their rightful and beloved lord, they said, that they wished to abandon all true memory of the means by which their deliverance had been secured?

13. And so, in this way, the journey was accomplished. Despite the dark, light at the end of the road finally opened. And the Nang Soumountha was returned at last to Pèng Chane from the winged house of the Nhak. And the wind-bells rang for joy in all the houses perched on stilts on the hills overlooking the city. Even the trees looked like dancers. And the Phaya, Koutsālat, in

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the midst of his age, came into blossom.

14. Leading all the general rejoicing, at the center of every celebration, the five princes were regaled with gifts and honors. They were made to tell their heroic tales over and over again, and crowned with iron crowns. No one tired of staring at them as they sat in fabulous state beside the Phaya their father. Despite the penalties, there was speculation in every house as to which of them should succeed to the throne when the Phaya went at last, as he must, to his fathers; and even the aristocrats fought with each other like wild animals over the princes' least relic, from the hem of a skirt to a morsel of gold-dust from one of their collars.

15. After the excitement had somewhat abated, and Soumountha was finally left alone for a time with her brother, she recounted to him for the first time the true history of her rescue from the Nhak, and of the events leading to the death of his lost son, Sin Xai. Koutsālat, however, had already been warned by the five princes that this might transpire; and had been told that Soumountha's suffering at the hands of Koum Phan, and later, during the terrible return journey through the wilderness, had almost certainly affected the balance of her mind; and that this had served to infect the mind of her daughter also. And so, although out of his great love he made every effort to comfort and calm her, he would not believe her story, and would take no action against his five hero sons.

16. Some time after this, an unknown merchant was brought before the Phaya as he sat in his judging seat in the room of thrones, with the Nang Soumountha beside him. And when the Phaya commanded the merchant to present his suit, he bowed without speaking, and drew forth from a satchel that he had with him two objects; and he came up to the throne and put them down at the Phaya's feet, and drew back without speaking. And Soumountha, seeing them, cried out and said, *Behold, the god is come again into his own country*. And Koutsālat saw before him the royal turban and the loin-cloth of a god which Soumountha had left in the cairn on the cliff-edge. And he knew the truth. And he rose to seek the merchant, but he had vanished.

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17. Now the anger of the Phaya was greatly aroused; and he was terrible, and splendid. And he caused the brazen trumpets to be sounded, and the drums of strong hide. And he summoned his ministers, and chief priests, and all his wives before him, and commanded that his five sons be stripped of their iron crowns and honors and brought in chains to him, that he might pass judgement. And he instructed his bowmen to loose their strings. When the five princes were brought to him, as he had commanded, he showed them the god's relics and asked if they knew them. And they did. And they fell on their faces before him. And the bowmen took up their strings and dispatched them there, in the room of thrones to which they had aspired. And the joy of Soumountha was terrible, and splendid.

18. Immediately after these events, the Phaya, at the head of a great train, with Soumountha by his side and his bowmen before him, set off from Pèng Chane in search of his lost son. As he went, the people came out in crowds to salute him. Everywhere he was bombarded with flowers. The trees bowed low as he passed, and dropped their leaves to make a path before him. And even the wildest animals of the jungle, elephant and snake and tiger, stood by the side of the path and paid him homage.

19. Because of his courage and justice, long suffering led him to wisdom. And Pra-In, out of his mercy, set an omen to guide him: a dazzling white crane with yellow beak and wings tipped with fire, sign of the All-Powerful, King of the Gods. And Koutsālat, following the crane, came in procession to the palace at the secret heart of the forest. And there he found Sin Xai, restored to life by Pra-In, his golden body sheathed in a great light and blazing as with a thousand thousand jewels. On either side, bathed in the light, sat Sang Thong and Sihālat; and at his feet knelt his mother, the Nang Là, and his aunt, the Nang Chantha. And the Phaya raised up the wives he had abandoned, and who thereby had come to greatness, and himself knelt at his son's feet and asked for his blessing. And during all this time the Khout never stopped singing.

20. And so it was that Sin Xai, heaven-hero, keeper of his

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father's promise, king and magician, splendid as a young god in the world's morning, returned at last to his own country. And they put on him the royal turban of gold and silver threads, and the loin-cloth of gold leather, that had belonged to a god. And it was fitting, for he had shown without doubt that he had the true blood of God in him.

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BERT O. STATES

The Case for Plot in Modern Drama

I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE A STEP TOWARD putting the word *Plot* back into use as the indispensable "soul" of dramatic composition. What will be said here by way of definition, or re-definition, will not be fresh news to old plot-lovers, especially the Aristotelians (to whom my debt will be obvious); but the present situation in the criticism of "modern" drama seems to warrant a review of our ideas about Plot and the formal principle behind it. My point is simply this: in the momentum of our proud revolution against the "Old" drama we have deprived ourselves of the best way of making aesthetic sense out of the strange and intractable materials of the New. You might say we have exiled our Philoctetes.

To sketch in the problem, by example, an essay I choose more or less at random from a recent collection of essays on the modern drama—John Russell Brown's "Mr. Pinter's Shakespeare"—suggests that with the advent of Absurdity we can no longer analyze a play in terms of Exposition, Development, and Conclusion: "it is more accurate to say that Exposition has become Development, and Conclusion as well." The strategy of Pinter's plays, for instance, is to hold the audience's attention by "small, disconnected incidents while the play-long interests are being manifested at a different level of consciousness." Pinter, Brown concludes, is asking his audience "to transfer its interest away from narrative toward inner development," or "a progressive disclosure of antagonisms, desires or appetites which are hidden at the beginning." A famous passage by Ionesco is quoted to wrap it up: The play "progresses not through a predetermined subject and plot, but through an increasingly intense and revealing series of emotional states, . . . the exteriorization of a psychic dynamism, a projection onto the stage of internal conflict, of the universe that lies within. . . . " All the New dramatists, Brown concludes, "would be at one with Ionesco in claiming freedom from plot or

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clear thematic development." And, judging by what one reads, most critics would be at one with Mr. Brown in claiming they were right. Plot, roughly synonymous with Narrative these days, is now a lure, a concession to the bewildered audience. But at the rate the "education" is proceeding, we can soon chuck it completely and get on with the work at hand—the exteriorization of these hidden dynamisms.

It is really hard to get beyond this idea of "inner development" in the criticism. Since 1896, that memorable year when, as if by timed conspiracy, Chekhov singlehandedly slew the Plot, Maeterlinck drew up the manifesto of the Static Drama, and Absurdity sprang, full-born, from Ubu's thigh, plays are simply developed "from the inside." The trouble is, no one has bothered to explain just what this means, or how it works. One gathers that it refers to a development which is *felt,* as opposed to *understood,* one which descends from the words by a kind of *post hoc* lag to (as Mr. Brown says) "a different level of consciousness" where meanings are stored, out of time, and thereafter well up as real experience does—with a confused significance, or better, a significant confusion, as in a dream. And the whole appeal of the New drama is said to rest on its ability to tap experience of this kind, bodying it forth unconfined by a narrative strait-jacket. As Martin Esslin says, the play is free to travel "from an unknown premise X towards an unknowable conclusion Y."

The most diligent expression of the idea I have been able to find is an essay by Marvin Rosenberg in *The Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism* (December 1958) titled "A Metaphor for Dramatic Form" (reprinted in John Gassner's *Directions in Modern Theatre and Drama,* 1965). Since Mr. Rosenberg seems to be the only critic to attempt an outright *aesthetic* examination, we owe his "metaphor" our attention.

He suggests that dramatic action is likely to take one of two general forms: the Linear and the Contextual. The Linear drama practically defines itself: it unfolds in a tight, sequential movement, "from left to right," having "a firm texture that will bear the weight of our full scrutiny, sensual, emotional, intellectual." "Every important speech or action is an arrow pointing to the next speech or action, all merging into the sequential Aristotelian beginning-middle-end pattern." One thinks of Shakespeare,

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Ibsen and the Well-made Play; at the extreme, Melodrama. The Contextual form, on the other hand, is a revolt against Linear neatness and simplicity. It is "modern" and wants to represent the "incompleteness, the discontinuous continuity, the confused emotional tone of living"; it tries, therefore, to "hold the mind on intensity rather than carry it along a line, to set up a system of tensions within the frame, so the mind does not follow a familiar image but instead acquaints itself with a complex, subtle experience." In sum, the Contextual play strives for "tensions of context," rather than direction, "of vertical depth, rather than horizontal movement, . . . a kind of free-association of the sort Joyce developed." Mr. Rosenberg's primary examples are Chekhov and Beckett and of course the entire New drama.

He doesn't imply that all Linear drama goes bounding stubbornly to a plotty conclusion, or that Contextual drama is forever wandering in the back-country of the mind. He means that Linear drama *tends* to draw its force from what in it is sequential and "syllogistic," the Contextual from juxtapositions, associations, moments of "chorded experience." And, though he doesn't say so, I suppose it would be possible to have a little of both, as in Hamlet's "Now might I do it pat" speech where the forward line is suddenly, if predictably, arrested by a tension which comes swimming into the context. What he offers us is simply a visual or vectorial metaphor by which we can accommodate our intuitions about a particular play's forceful movement. Thus a play like *The Revenger's Tragedy* (my example) may be mentally charted as a strictly linear affair, thin and fast, filled with "arrow-acts"; a "great linear play" like *Hamlet* (his / ?), with "the extra dimension of the soliloquy," might offer a considerably thicker, more sluggish horizontal; and a play like *Waiting for Godot,* which "ends exactly where it began," would be all vertical, one long plummet into the "timeless . . . condition of living," one long "now."

If you leave the metaphor intact, it appears to have flushed out the dynamics of the New drama. But if you begin thinking about the play as occurring *in time,* as something *acted out,* problems arise. As a start, it is hard to make an unfolding drama stick to any concept of a vertical axis I can envision; in the mind it wants somehow to fall, become a horizontal like other fictions, a se-

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quence. Moreover, exactly what *is* a tension of context? How do you know one? Are there none in "If it were done when 'tis done, then 'twere well/ It were done quickly," etc. etc.? But leaving these matters aside, the point which concerns me is that the essay is not really about Form at all—unless we are to take the word *Form* metaphorically too; it ought to be titled "A Metaphor for Dramatic *Effect*," for Mr. Rosenberg is simply offering impressions of his emotional reactions *to* form. What he construes as *the artist's* power of "free association" (i.e., his "freedom" from the "tyranny" of sequence) is simply the evocation in the audience (here himself) of *the illusion* that the play is free-associated, giving us life's discontinuous continuity, confusion, and so on. In reality, the playwright is still hard at work in the same old beginning-middle-end rut that has enslaved drama since Abydos. Assuming, of course, that Beginning, Middle, and End are not thought of as certain laws passed by Aristotle, but demands made by the mind of all art, requirements of discourse.

This is far more than an academic matter of getting our terms straight. Here, it seems to me, is a symptom of a great confusion, or better still, a great disinterest; a key reason (among many) why the criticism of the drama—especially the New drama—is the most backward, incomplete criticism being written today; why we have no adequate aesthetic of the dramatic form, or why what aesthetic we do have has been contributed by visitors from other disciplines which teach, as a matter of first principles, that you can't confuse the work of art with the experience it refers to, if you want to admire it as art. Most drama critics consider their job as ending when the play is completely translated over into a human context where the characters cease to be aspects of form and become extensions of ourselves. If we admire form at all, it is as one might admire a landscape from a speeding car. And in almost every case where we linger for a better view, we get a criticism in which the vocabulary of formal analysis that has been patiently worried out of abstraction by such drama-oriented critics-at-large as Kenneth Burke, Francis Fergusson, Northrop Frye, and Susanne Langer is being applied with naive confidence to something which exists only in the realm of pure impression. Thus it comes about that the base upon which our attempts to discuss the form of modern drama has settled is a sheer absurdity:

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these plays do not imitate actions, they imitate the mind; or, in clearer terms, these plays do not have plots, they have psychology.

Technically, I suppose, Mr. Rosenberg is not talking about plot. But his definition of Linear drama is, in effect, a definition of plot as we popularly use the word: that is, a chain of "dramatic" events based on a sequential and chronological "story" structure. As a "tool" for understanding form, this concept breaks down soon after you leave the violence of pure melodrama, whatever that is. Yet it continues to be our accepted frame of reference even though playwrights no longer feel obliged to build plays out of such "plots" as this definition implies, and audiences are no longer confused if they don't. It is a little like defining Motherwell's style by saying that he doesn't paint like David—he paints like Freud.[1]

The depressing thing about the persistence of this concept of plot is that it has been thoroughly refuted by a rather sizable body of criticism. In fact, the "heresy of plot" was pretty well a settled matter as long ago as 1909 when A. C. Bradley (of all people) warned us, as the Sorcerer might have warned the Apprentice, of the danger of thinking of "action" and "character" as something apart from the rest of the work. While it is "both legitimate and valuable," he says in "Poetry for Poetry's Sake," to isolate these things for *certain* critical projects (i.e., *Shakespearean Tragedy*), we must remember that they are in no sense a part of *the form* of the work, but rather "a faint analogue of one aspect of it taken in detachment from the whole." And inevitably, "plot" will be an analogue of the play's "experience." What disappears from a plot summary, for the most part, is the whole sense in which the work is a fiction, or has a verbal and gestural continuity which its raw subject matter (say, Holinshed's *Chronicles*) has not. Plots, in this aspect, appeal primarily as *morality in action:* they are narcissistic means of sifting out of the work a causal sequence based on "acts" arising from "character." And it is to the point that "plot" disappears from our fictions, gradually, as our belief in the efficacy of morality declines and we come to the conclusion that we are victims of accident, or

[1] See Rudolf Arnheim, "Accident and The Necessity of Art," *Journal of Aesthetics and Art Criticism*, XVI, 2 (December 1957), 18-31. Here Mr. Arnheim demolishes (for this reader anyway) the idea that there is such a thing as "accident" or disorder in painting. His arguments apply equally well to my case against plotlessness.

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at the whim of a treacherous unconscious for which we are not responsible.

Reuben Brower was repeating Bradley's warning in 1952 when he pointed out, in "The Heresy of Plot," that the critic of "modern" literature, having been deserted by The Story, would do well to shift his attention from the old synopsis concept of plot to Aristotle's *other,* neglected concept of plot as the *arche,* or "soul," of drama; that is, that he begin looking at the play not as a sequence of "events" but as a sequence of "ordered meanings going toward a conclusion," of "expressions that build up in the reader's consciousness a recognizable pattern of human behavior." Which is simply a recognition of the fact that "acts" or "events" had assumed an entirely different character with a different sort of causality and therefore require of the critic a different sort of tracking system—an adjustment in perspective which any scientist, confronting a new form of life in a dynamic environment, would make in a flash. R. S. Crane ("The Concept of Plot and The Plot of *Tom Jones*"), Francis Fergusson ("On Certain Technical Concepts"), and Elder Olson (*Tragedy and The Theory of Drama*), among others, have argued various aspects of this same position: that plot is best thought of as a *principle* rather than a thing, as the *synthesis* of the individual incidents, not as the incidents synthesized; and an incident, as Henry James long ago observed, may be something as slight as a woman looking at you in a certain way (as for example Masha Prozoroff looks at Vershinin when she says, "I think I'll stay to lunch."). Plot, in short, is *what we have, as we have it.* Like Antony's crocodile, it is shaped like itself, it lives by what nourishes it, and "the elements once out of it, it transmigrates."

Now it may be argued that, like Antony, we are simply using a word to define itself, and getting nowhere. But the virtue of this concept of plot-as-play does not lie in its usefulness as a tool for miniaturizing the play, making it "portable," but in its insurance that we keep the play at the right remove from reality. In fact, plot may be thought of as the peculiar *rhythm* of fiction. I don't mean this word metaphorically either. I intend it, first, as it is used by Susanne Langer in her essay on "The Musical Matrix"—that aspect of movement in which "one can sense a beginning, intent, and consummation, and see in the last stage of one the condition and indeed the rise of another. Rhythm is the

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setting-up of new tensions by the resolution of former ones." Moreover, "deeply involved" with rhythm is the principle of Repetition, or "the sort of play on a basic pattern, especially the reflection of the over-all plan in the structure of each part, that is characteristic of organic forms." In effect, this is the very core of Miss Langer's well-known theory of "Form in suspense" which occurs in a later chapter of *Feeling and Form* titled "the Dramatic Illusion," a theory I think Mr. Rosenberg widely misunderstands in calling it a "manifestation of the 'linear pattern'," and not adaptable to his "contextual" drama (which may apparently stalk its dynamisms any way it pleases). This is not a particularly mysterious or esoteric concept. Miss Langer is talking about basic matters, a Golden Rule we *know* but tend to ignore. In simpler language, here is a playwright, Duerrenmatt, saying the same thing: "Just as dialogue must develop out of a situation, so it must also lead into some situation, that is to say, of course, a new situation. Dramatic dialogue effects some action, some suffering, some new situation, out of which in turn new dialogue can again develop. . . ." In other words, the *root* necessity of dramatic writing, a necessity from which literary fictions like the novel can easily lapse, is that it be continually evolving, *in words that are translatable into physical gestures,* the "future" which it promises. Each dramatist has his own way of doing this, but all must do it; the moment the dramatist loses track of his objective, the play is flawed, the audience bewildered. Here, in short, is a Law of dramatic composition which applies equally well to something as direct and unabashed as:

> Meantime we shall express our darker purpose.
> Give me the map there. Know that we have divided
> In three our kingdom; and 'tis our fast intent
> To shake all cares and business from our age,
> Conferring them on younger strengths, while we
> Unburden'd crawl toward death. . . .

or to something as far-out as:

> ESTRAGON: . . . Nothing to be done.
> VLADIMIR: . . . I'm beginning to come round to that opinion. All my life I've tried to put it from me, saying, Vladimir, be reasonable, you haven't yet tried everything. And I resumed the struggle. . . . So there you are again.
> ESTRAGON: Am I?

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There are any number of ways you can differentiate these two passages and the plays which they announce, but one thing they have in common with all dramatic beginnings—they are refining from the infinite world of possibility the subjects, or Destinies, as Miss Langer calls it, which they will now elaborate with a *critical* economy and coherence, a *method* which situates the drama very close to poetry in the care and precision with which it must be developed. This can be better explained by a second, and overlapping, sense in which we may apply the concept of *rhythm* to dramatic progression; that is, as it is defined by the French aesthetician Raymond Bayer, in an essay ("The Essence of Rhythm") which I am afraid does not reduce very well: rhythm, says M. Bayer, is the "precise law" of *all* art, the manner in which the work reveals its "constancy." The mode in which rhythm expresses itself in the drama is the plot, which may be considered as the plane on which the "traits" of the audience are brought on line with the traits of the work, or the traits the playwright wishes his work to have, producing for us a "perceptible universe" with its *own special* "determinism." This determinism, we may add, has nothing whatever to do with one incident "causing" another, or with the momentum or complexity of "events," but rather with the artist's having *willed,* through an interplay of intentions he never wholly understands himself, that everything be put down just as it is. It is this determinism which is the key factor in the approach to form, not the susceptibility or the unsusceptibility of the action to a "syllogistic" abridgement. Where this word *syllogistic* (our unhappy "metaphor" for the Old drama) has clouded our thinking is in our assuming that the pursuit of a proposition in the aesthetic mode can be equated with the pursuit of a proposition in the logical mode—as if it somehow follows that *King Lear,* because it dramatizes the consequences of men's acts, is more logically put together than *Waiting for Godot,* which dramatizes (to simplify) the absence of consequence in men's acts. I suggest that the syllogistic, as we normally use the word, is simply an assumption inherent in the materials *to be dramatized,* something the dramatist either inherits or does not inherit, as his moment in history indicates; and that when he wants to reveal, say, "the universe that lies within" he does not leave the Tower of Logic to

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wander in the Gardens of the Arbitrary whose lotus induces free-association, communion with the unconscious, and the like. He simply does what Miss Langer and Duerrenmatt say he does: he elaborates an idea in the dramatic mode, be it the effects of a King's "folly" in the Age of Faith or the conditions of "struggle" in the Age of Angst.

If anything, I would be inclined to credit the Elizabethan with a more casual concern for the "logic" (or linearity) of his moral "syllogism" than the Absurdist has for the logic of his amoral "paradox." To be sticky about formal license for a moment, in what Absurdist, excepting perhaps Beckett, do we find the sheer embroidery of a Mab or a This England speech, or the masque, the dumb show, the song, the multiple "plot," the great range of texture between tragic and comic, *dulce* and *utile,* between intricate characterization and fortuitous butchery, finally the oddly compatible mating of the play as abstract and chronicle of its time and the play as passing entertainment? So relentlessly, in contrast, does the Absurdist pursue his thesis that we are apt to say of his play what Empson said of Maeterlinck's: "They are only good from one point of view."

But we would serve our interests in form much better by noting that this is not really formal *license* either, but part of the Elizabethan assumption that a play *ought,* as a matter of course, to do a good many more things than we ask it to do today (for obvious reasons). Kenneth Burke makes an excellent remark about *Hamlet* in his essay on *Othello* that only in so far as the "tactics of delay" (which we may equate, for present uses, with Beckett's tactics of "waiting") are acceptable to an audience is the continuation of the play possible. You may regard the remark as self-evident, but note that Burke's eye is fixed where few critics have it, squarely on the point where form originates—on the tolerances of an audience which can only respond to the play, as he goes on to say, "with the same equipment as it brings to reading the lines of its daily paper." That is, it can only respond if the play unfolds in a sequence that is reasonable and appropriate *under the circumstances.* And in this realm we must include nothing less than the whole complex of the audience's enthusiasms—both the larger ethnic temper which is not satisfied until the disaster is as ubiquitous as the playwright can manage, how-

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ever far-fetched the logic ("*Gertrude, do not drink!*"), and the timely "gossip" of Hamlet's swipe at the competition at Blackfriar's.

A refreshing way to look at the New drama, in fact, may be to see it in terms of the Game theory discussed some years ago by the psychologists. If you think of the play as a game between audience and author, *all* new drama, in its time, may be viewed not only as the playwright-thinker's triumph over hitherto unreachable experience but as the audience's gradual triumph over the *old* drama (which is not to say that an audience then dismisses the old drama: it simply consigns it, if worthy, to the "classic" status—temporarily benign, but recoverable). When the audience becomes relatively immune to the tensions through which the old drama has made sport with it, the new playwright (rising himself from the audience) once again challenges it "to play," to be re-engaged. In other words, at the same time as we cry aloud with Victor Hugo, "Nature at last!" we are also crying (more likely whispering), "A new game at last!" Viewed like this, Absurdity (which was complete as an ideological construct, surely, with Gogol and Dostoevsky) appeals not only as an expression of our irksome "condition" but as an antidote to the audience's satiation with, say, Realism, which was itself an antidote to well-made-ism. Absurdity is an excuse to scramble the puzzle and begin again. In its bleak humours we have hit a windfall rich enough to tempt a playwright with a Rotarian morality. Here, before us again, in new and untried combinations, are the same husky energies of vice and corruption which were once displayed, as that arch-immoralist Boccaccio slyly said, to "work righteousness" in the audience. The outward form they take may be different but the structure of their appeal is the same. Thus Absurdity ironically returns to the stage the very virtues for which its mortal "linear" enemy, Melodrama, was awarded a long life—those of suspense, shock, and trickery. For instance, in a play as "aimless" as *Godot*, there is a strong sense of Beckett the Magician putting himself in the worst possible predicament (strait-jacketing himself with a "plot" in which "nothing happens") and then getting out of it to the delight of an audience which knows he *must*, otherwise it wouldn't have been invited hither. And just as the magician's predicament conceals the means

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of his escape, there is a sense in which Beckett has released *all* "plot" by appearing to have none at all; for he has found a form in which the most durable and exciting rhythms of tragedy, comedy, and farce are able to thrive side by side in an almost pure state. Thus, in *Godot,* "while waiting," we have such sure-fire theatre stuff—the very guts of Elizabethan drama—as quarrel and make-up scenes, song-and-dance scenes, scenes of cruelty, pathos scenes, bawdry, rant and declamation, a play-within-a-play, a reversal and recognition, and one of the most original uses of the *deus ex machina* on record. A lot for the money. In fact, we might even say that a good bit of *Godot's* unusual appeal (convicts and children love it!) rests in its not *having* to mean anything at all to be enjoyed. Like *Our Town* before it (which it may soon replace in the amateur repertory), it delivers us into a contentment with the bold simplicity of its form. When Beckett reportedly answered someone's foolish question, "Why is the play in two acts?" by saying that three would have been too long and one too short, he probably had in mind the tolerances of an audience for a play whose theatrics are built up out of the milking of an ingenious device, as Shakespeare milks the theatrics of delay in *Hamlet.*

Needless to say, Genet and Pinter are masters of shock and surprise of a very high order. Beneath the so-called "dark" trickery of Ionesco, I suspect, beats the heart of a nice old romantic who, in other days, would have been writing gay, fast-moving farces on the order of *The Italian Straw Hat.* And in this country, we have a veritable Cyril Tourneur in Edward Albee, whose thematic coherence gives way, at every turn, to an array of sensational stunts, producing a sort of living-room *guignol* in which the characters (who have something of the revolting vitality of Tourneur's creatures) are inevitable victims of their author's plot to outrage his audience. Albee's people do not really have motivations, they have potentials for violence.

My intent is not to belittle these talents, which are occasionally considerable. If I exaggerate their trickery, by which I mean the fair share of their right to be discussed seriously, is it purely in reaction to hearing them always passed off as Martin Heidegger. Surely it is safe to admit, without diminishing our theatre, that the playwright is a hitch-hiker in the realm of philosophy, that

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he comes into his own by rendering our "expanding consciousness," as Herbert Read calls it, in theatrical entertainments. That he has a part in refining that consciousness no one should doubt. But he is the last of our artists to catch, in his art, the tempo of existence—not because he is typically duller than other artists, but because he waits upon an audience that must be mnemonically prepared in the new rhythms by the slow process of cultural absorption. Only then can he invite it to play.

The rejection of plot is a good deal like the rejection of ornamental prose staged so ostentatiously by novelists early in this century. Indeed, they are probably skirmishes of the same revolution and I doubt that that revolution has been better summed up than by Mr. Burke in *Counter-Statement*:

> As artists no longer wished to produce the kinds of effect which the devices of the rhetoricians were designed to produce, they overshot the mark—and to turn against a specific method of specific rhetoricians, they persuaded themselves that they were turning against rhetoric *in toto*. Thus, since the rhetorical procedure had become identified as the art of appeal, the artist who chose to appeal in other ways felt that he had given up any attempt to appeal at all. This led, above all, to a denigration of form (formal devices being a major portion of the rhetorician's lore); and the one factor in keeping such denigration of form from doing great damage was the artist's tendency to preserve many more aspects of form than he was aware of. Once again the issue was improperly diagnosed—and in revolting against certain kinds of form, the artist persuaded himself that he was revolting against form in general.

The practice of denigrating form is probably the artist's most traditional way of escaping the gravity of tradition, and for the inspiration it bestows I hardly begrudge Ionesco the right to tell us he is writing from the universe within, rather than from a predetermined subject and plot. We know what he means. But it is another thing when the artist has persuaded the critic to join his Cult of the Interior, of the Formless, the Irrational, the Anti-, and (as I write) a host of fresh synonyms for this mythical freedom being promoted by the *Tulane Drama Review* (my favorites being the "non-matrixed situation" and the "inscape"). These are the terms of a criticism with one foot in a naive aesthetic, the other in the same murky psychologism Burke was la-

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menting in the Twenties. There are certainly good reasons why we have settled upon them. For one thing, they wear comfortably, having a respectability conferred by Science itself; but at the same time they are imprecise enough to give us the illusion that we are talking about matters of Art when we are really talking only about ourselves. But then, as Shakespeare's Edmund reasons, "men are as the time is." So you could argue that since our criticism is as true an image of us as our art, we are getting more or less what we deserve.[2]

[2] I have not tried to account here for the unmistakable difference in form between the "Old" drama and the "New." It is clearly a book-length order. Suffice to say that in making my "case" for plot I hardly feel that all modes of plot organization and progression are identical. Mr. Burke has made useful comments on this point, distinguishing various forms of formal organization in the *Lexicon Rhetoricae*. The "modern" play, as Mr. Burke shows in an article which has appeared during the writing of this essay, seems to rely heavily on what Burke calls Repetitive Form. In fact, out of the amazing riches of the *Lexicon* one can generate enough formal principles to make common sense out of the New drama without resorting to a single metaphor or couch-phrase. Also, Mr. Crane makes useful distinctions between plots of action, plots of character, and plots of idea; Elder Olson notes at least four forms of plot organization in *Tragedy and The Theory of Drama,* two of which—the Descriptive and the Pattern—apply excellently to much modern drama. Miss Una Ellis-Fermer's concept of the "presence of form" in *Frontiers of Drama* (see also, her "The Nature of Plot in Drama") bears implications for plotting techniques from Chekhov forward; and finally, Northrop Frye's idea of "the ironic play" as the characteristic dramatic form of our century remains uninvestigated. His discussion in *Anatomy of Criticism* of the formal nature of the ironic play is only suggestive, but I gather he is thinking of irony not in the sense that there *are* ironies in Shakespeare or in Sophocles, but of the play *as* an irony, or in Cleanth Brooks' term, "irony as structure." It seems to me, at any rate, that the ironic play implies a new relationship between the author and his characters, one in which the play may be said to be author-driven as opposed to character-driven. In other words, while a plot summary of "character" action and motive in an Absurd play might make very little sense, the play would make sense when examined from the viewpoint of the strategy of an author who afflicts his characters with problems and crises not of their own design or understanding, particularly as Beckett and Pinter do. I hope to make this idea clearer (perhaps I should say *clear!*) in an essay now in progress.

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DENNIS SCHMITZ

The Summers Sun

The Soldier armd with Sword & Gun
Palsied strikes the Summers Sun
—William Blake

I: WINTER

there are open fields
behind your eyes & the nervous
rains soak still
pools that give back no face
or uncertain shadows

dark fish flickering under
the lids, you say.
shells (the doctors say) with suits
that unbutton blue flame.
your own clothes are corrective

white
camouflage for it is winter
in the hospital & outside your country
falls asleep in soft

coils of snow

II: SPRING

you pray the dead will not rise
up nor stick to your
shoes as you waver on your sticks
down the hall to welcome
spring like some weathered sapling.

two months you have endured
the darkened sun.
you sliced open this morning's dawn
with your profile

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on the window, drawing red light
like a transfusion through your veins.
still lame you journey

down the same corridor
you came by
born again in green: in uniform
though released. your pockets

breathe freely.

III: SUMMER

that summer you returned

to the farm, found you could
reinstruct the watercourses,
without thinking
followed the scarecrow's cruel
shadow down the rows

of corn. the birds refused
all summer to settle
drew patterns
above till you thought of planes

& the yellow bodies where a strange
jungle plant flowers
overnight red in the openings
of the dead: anus, mouth
or wound—once in the whorls of a dead

child's ear. they said it was blood
until you saw the green
oubliette of a bud unopened yet
you agreed. you confessed
then what the sweet grains of shrapnel

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grew. today you stripped the green
casing of every ear of corn
in the row before your brother
stopped you. seeking
for yourself an opening, in the yellow

bodies some borrowed grain.

IV: AUTUMN

the silver pillars of the hospital
pour red reflections
on the walks. the leaves

have turned & the trees stoop
before their own long
shadows. out on the lawn you sit
in a folding chair portable

yourself & study the great beast
that rises
from the bulldozer across the street
where a house has fallen
in on itself, fold on fold
of skin. last night you dreamed

of an insect trapped
inside the wrinkles of an elephant's
hide. as he walked
his slow organs rippled cabbages,
carrots & wisps of straw

through his body. tonight the great
beast crosses the yellow
warning line where the free-way
follows through the bones

of the fallen house.

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V: WINTER

the snow again presses
a white face to the window. you try
to refuse it entrance.
the doctor draws the shade

& your dark insides flick
on the small X-ray
window. there is nothing wrong
they say & follow
your wounds

with a pencil. you fear the white
medic coat that moves
out of the dark like a paradigm

of winter crystal, ice &
drifts that never melt in hollows
till the green seedlings
crawl through the sun-darkened slush
like insects. you shout, overturn

the machine & stand nude as one
switches
on the light to reveal
your wounds & the dark stitches
that travel across your stomach where

your navel winks like a buried star

Poem That I May Survive the Winter

I have refused to shut
out desire. I have fed at the malevolent
ditches, pools where the thin skull

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of a sparrow floats
easily once free of the bones
and the blown flesh testy
with flies. I have eaten
with mice at the soft edges
of the field, where the heads
of the cattails comb
pollen from the wind. once I fed
the birds
my fingerprints, pretending they were
a quince's rind, medicinal
bones hollow as flutes and the weary
heart I gave too.

but now I forget humiliation
I despise the animals that are perpetually
competent. I know even the ants
will have children
stubbornly, sliding their hills
wave on lipless wave
down the long bay of grass.

I will love the philodendron's flowerless
vine. the blue hyacinth Apollo shaped
from the blood of a boy
he loved. I will teach the exiles
the slow fertility
of stars, the flavors
of stones the frost bites
open like pippens, that only
the roots the winter has nailed
deep will survive.

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JOSEPH BENNETT

Easter Carnival

Wreaths to cross the structure of the grave. . . .
Content with the deep fosse
Where the bones protrude, splintered ends
Where the shovel went down
The lop-sided coffins tipped, in the settling earth, tiered,
Askew, tiaras slipping
Queens in the grave with dead eyes
The lily sceptres clutched
The floral necklaces
Executed in metal, enamels
Bright against time
Golden faceplates
Exactly modeled to the flesh
Which adheres and will not corrode away
Where precious metal bites the skin.
O fingers of floral bronze, dark-green enamels
Bright spots upon the puncture of the nails
Lacquered feet
Wrapped in miles of gauze
In the spherical drop, down the sides, gliding,
Sliding down the base
Inside the perfectly spherical glass
Transparencies assail the senses
Offal is removed
There is scarcely a veil of gauze
That does not waver in the light-blue, dust-blue iridescent light
In the dust, glazed, from the sun
Sifting through this shaftway
Above is the hazy forest, crowded with trees,
Plants and vines, swaying, tangled, lianas above us
In the roots that seek our skulls
The faces of infants were long ago merged in the silence
Above the pit where the dark branches etch their patterns in
twilight

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The haze of red evening descending
In the smoke and fog of the forest
Where footfalls
Do not come
The deer gaze, startled,
With enormous walnut eyes
The leaves are paralyzed in the lack of wind
The forest breathes its own breath
Exhaling from its graves
Where the leaves burn in ragged sheets of red
Across the open mouth of fosse in deep forest
In redness of silent flame, the only skylight
Is the redness of the night closing down
There are no flights across this rambling forest
These woods sweeping up the sides
In hollows, up and down the crest,
No mud, no water, all is dry
The silent flames prance across the open graves
The myriad pits of tilted coffins
And the flames are like soundless waves,
And the sea is red here, flickers,
Alone, a pool in each pit,
Discontent, agitating its pennons
Of pure-red flame
And the smoke rises above all the little seas
With their turbulent rising, falling waves
And the smoke gathers
And there is a blueness now above the woods
Where you will not cross
O go down now
In the obscure ferry
Across the stream that is no stream
But a river of light
A channel of smoke,
Winding,
A corridor of flame
Through locked-in mountains, where springing through the
water gaps
Where issue not rivers but torrents of smoke

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Acrid, plunging like cataracts down water-courses
And in the night
The smoke-rivers gather and form among the flames
Here where the trees rise high
We can watch above our heads
The steady progression of night, the smoke
Hollowing our cheeks
Those blind eyes
Of the walnut deer
Lie across our faces
And our only moisture is sucked from their light
Our breathing is rapid in the face of the deer
The close face, the licking lips, thick with the taste of greenery
Green leaves, masticated, upon their coarse tongues; the soft-
ness of
Their fur; their tickling, nubbing antlers.

They have coursed through channels of smoke
Leaping the pits of flame
Falling downward
Through the corridors, the cut cataracts of underworld
Where Hades is a labyrinth of turning, angular, square-cut
corridors
Where the supreme judge sits in his network of routes
Blind, and radiating, and through the mine, with its geometric
traverses,
The smoke gathers, blinding the eyes
Of Hades himself
And the judge sits blind
Waiting for the spread of flames
Roasted with his dogs
On his throne
The hot grillwork of iron
Toasting his hairy backside
Hades screams, knowing pain
And the graves turn in their turmoil,
Surrounding the judge,
Wood and bones, cracked lacquer
Acres of gold teeth

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Waiting for a smile from the horned, hairy face
And the faun-like ears
And the mischievous behind
Pipes of Pan, and grapes,
Satyr of the underworld
Plays his tune, seductive, as his world burns
And he roasts and screams
And the graves, turning now and groaning, are opened
And there the miraculous bodies, robed in light
Pass upward in the shoals of flame
And hell burns, and there the devil burns
This mock judge does not see the Resurrection
Awaiting each charnel; he holds carnival—
For forty days, he will not eat nor dance;
Now he churns on his red-hot throne
On his Fat Tuesday
And the Easter-robed ones seek a way out
And there is a route, and a way, and directions are posted
They emerge, into the forest, among crackling flames,
The seas, dry and hot, move towards them
They seek to return; the holes are gone;
Hades is alone, below; beginning his fast.
Now lost from any Easter
They wait for the rain that will save them
But they burn alive
And are consumed, again, these dead,
Twice dying, that He may live,
That He may rise, like a submerged sunburst,
Our three days' visitor, pressed down to hell—
But the devil waits, holding carnival with Him, then fast;
He will not come out.
O they have stayed below, the Two; they have joined forces
And the robed souls stray alone; in the vast forest
For now the sunrise will not come
And they wait out the eternal night
Hearing the sound of feasting below.

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DAVID WAGONER

Speech from a Comedy, II

(Scene: The wreckage of Heaven)

God must be master in his own house,
And if that means firing servants and wiping out stains and exterminating vermin,
that's the way it goes.
We all have quirks and personality flaws.
(Chorus) His eye is on the sparrows.
I remember Heaven as it used to be:
A permanent, respectable, fashionable palace of jade and porphyry
Where nothing was boring and everyone listened to me.
(*Chorus*) God is a mystery.
It's hard enough to be God, let alone a full-time supervisor
Of every inch of earth, air, fire, and water.
I'm tired of squeezing into a glass of wine and a stale wafer.
(*Chorus*) God goes on forever.
I can still fly, I can move on the face of the waters, I can make
Thunder and lightning with a flick of the wrist. For God's sake,
How can Everyman possibly give *me* a headache?
(*Chorus*) God is not a joke.
I used to enjoy him. I could hear his prayers
And smell the charcoal-broiled offerings drifting up the back stairs.
Now all I hear and smell is General Motors.
(*Chorus*) God is full of orders.
I don't like Death any more than the next man:
He's always interrupting and he smells to high Heaven.
But somebody's got to take out the garbage and empty the bedpan.
(*Chorus*) God is Number One.
We all make mistakes, but I made a lulu
When I stranded the Ark and let everybody go.
I should have drowned old Noah and started a zoo.
(*Chorus*) God is turning blue.

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I didn't ask for this job in the first place.
Theatrically, Heaven and Earth are a dead loss.
I said, "Let there be light" not "Let there be egg on my face."
(*Chorus*) God is out of office.
I quit. I resign, Why, it's a miracle
I still have all my faculties from temple to temple.
If Everyman wants a King, he can go to Hell.
(*Chorus*) God's the Golden Rule.

Bums at Breakfast

Daily, the bums sat down to eat in our kitchen.
They seemed to be whatever the day was like:
If it was hot or cold, they were hot or cold;
If it was wet, they came in dripping wet.
One left his snowy shoes on the back porch
But his socks stuck to the clean linoleum,
And one, when my mother led him to the sink,
Wrung out his hat instead of washing his hands.

My father said they'd make a mark on the house,
A hobo's sign on the sidewalk, pointing the way.
I hunted everywhere, but never found it.
It must have said, "It's only good in the morning—
When the husband's out." My father knew by heart
Lectures on Thrift and Doggedness,
But he was always either working or sleeping.
My mother didn't know any advice.

They ate their food politely, with old hands,
Not looking around, and spoke in short, plain answers,
Sometimes they said what they'd been doing lately
Or told us what was wrong; but listening hard,
I broke their language into secret codes:
Their *east* meant *west,* their *job* meant *walking and walking,*
Their *money* meant *danger, home* meant *running and hiding,*
Their *father* and *mother* were different kinds of *weather.*

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Dumbly, I watched them leave by the back door,
Their pockets empty as a ten-year-old's;
Yet they looked twice as rich, being full of breakfast.
I carried mine like a lump all the way to school.
When I was growing hungry, where would they be?
None ever came twice. Never to lunch or dinner.
They were always starting fresh in the fresh morning.
I dreamed of days that stopped at the beginning.

Recollection

Dear, I have been days
Drudging at words. They lie
Wherever I put them down
As separate as stones.
There on the page, they are
Exactly what they are.

Only an hour ago
I was driving from nowhere
To nowhere in my car
When I remembered you—
As simply, as obviously
As men remember food
And turn from breaking stones
On stones, to break their bread.

This is the whole truth.
I stopped, and I sat down
On cinders, held my head
Together, took a drink
Of the unmanageable air
Where we first caught our breath,
And made this out of love.

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The Hold-up

First comes a fence, then the mouth of an alley,
Then a shadow on the other side of shadows
Becomes a pole, a doorway, a garbage can
Becoming a bush with a voice becoming an arm
Holding a gun at my back. This is a hold-up.
We wait a moment. We listen
For whatever it might be I'm going to say.
The wind crawls out from under the parked cars.

My arms go up in the air. My hands turn white.
Apparently I won't be saying anything.
He touches the empty pocket over my heart,
Then pats my hips as if guessing my weight.
Half-turning, I see the stocking over his face
Erasing eyes and lips, smoothing his nose.
We pass the time of night together.
He does the breathing for both of us.

The muzzle touches my back
Gently, like the muzzle of a dog. What's holding me up?
Take off your shoes. I stand in stocking feet
On the cinders. He begins to fade.
I had been walking from streetlight to streetlight,
My shadow straight as a footbridge under me,
Forgetting the mouths of alley by moonlight.
My shoes and my money are running away in the dark.

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ROBERT HASS

On the Coast near Sausalito

i

I won't say much for the sea
except that it was, almost,
the color of sour milk.
The sun in that clear
unmenacing sky was low,
angled off the grey fissure of the cliffs,
hills dark green with manzanita.

Low tide: slimed rocks
mottled brown and thick with kelp
like the huge backs of ancient tortoises
seemed to merge with the grey stone
of the breakwater, sliding off
to antedeluvian depths.
The old story: here filthy life begins.

ii

Fish-
ing, as Melville said,
"to purge the spleen,"
to put to task my clumsy hands
my hands that bruise by
not touching
pluck the legs from a prawn,
peel the shell off,
and curl the body twice about a hook.

iii

The cabezone is not highly regarded
by fishermen, except Italians
who have the simplicity
to fry the pale, almost bluish flesh
in olive oil with a sprig
of fresh rosemary.

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The cabezone, an ugly, atavistic fish,
as old as the coastal shelf
it feeds upon
has fins of duck's-web thickness,
resembles a prehistoric toad
and is delicately sweet.

Catching one, the fierce quiver of surprise
And the line's tension are
a recognition.

iv

A strange thing: to kill
for the sudden feel of life.
The danger is
to moralise
that strangeness.
Holding the spiny monster in my hands
his bulging purple eyes
were eyes and the sun was
almost tangent to the planet
on our uneasy coast.

Creature and creature,
we stared down centuries.

Above Drake's Bay

This wind is a gathering of storms,
a travelling of solitary violence,
a harrowing of these dry-yellow pastures
which plunge, gullying, into the sea
above the place where Francis Drake,
travelling, found harbor from this
same northwestern gathering of storms.

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All this unpeopled coast. The dairy cows
were not here nor the barbed wire fences.
A meagre country where all that lives
survives incessant wind: white dunes, eel grass,
brief cliffs, and undulating hills. Not much
here for the marvel-glutted mind
to moralise or weave a pattern from.
Alien, Drake conned the shore line
and the crest line and the landfalls from seaward.
Sailing south, he hugged the rocky edges of a coast
and settled on that bay below the Head.
The Miwoks thought their gods returned to earth.
They danced, brought gifts of seal meat and fur,
the women moaned and tore their flesh, hoping to
impress the spirits. They were a fishing tribe.
Their gods were fickle. The English sailors
assumed their magic was an act of feudal vassalage,
so the freebooter Drake, a taking man,
took the land and gave it to the Queen.
Ad gloriam Dei. This strange transaction
was recorded on a sheet of heavy brass
and sealed with a graven image of the Queen
on an English sixpence—an English sixpence
on this wild, barren, solitary coast
which stretched, for all Drake knew, to Asia.
What he saw can be no longer seen.
His journals barely note the herds of elk,
the yellowing fields and canyon live oak
rolling on for miles.
Two hundred fifty years
before the coast below Point Reyes was mapped
La Canada de Herrerra de Baulinas,
Drake, travelling, quit the silence of the bay.
Dwindling, his Miwok vassals scattered west
and gave the wind this coast, these rocks,
the hovering fog which blurs their harsh persistence
in the harrowing and perpetual gathering of storms.

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TRIM BISSELL

Two Poems

> No, Caesar hath it not. But you, and I,
> And honest Casca, we have the falling sickness.

DRIVING AT MIDNIGHT THROUGH THE CITY OF SNOW

Driving at midnight through the city of snow,
I meddle with the earth for my next poem:
Our planet hath the falling sickness; now
The frenetic light shines on foaming, foaming.

I rhymed my sins before I had a soul
Or sins. I rhyme my sins; what soul now?
Foaming and foaming: what a pretty sound;
Besides, what does it cost?

Driving on Doomsday through the City of Churches,
I blow my horn at stop-listen-look;
A slow train turns in the sleep of the city
To a procession of catafalques.

I checked in with poetry; it cost
My brains. I checked my cock with Emily;
It had never crossed my mind, of what lovely
Intersection we were capable.

Driving on Friday through the hands of Christ,
The executioner the nails the doubt.
Forgettable his scream, who saw his own ghost
Forsaking him like a father's comfort.

I wrote a love poem to Emily:
Cock crow!
"Before morning, you will make me thrice."
I fell on Emily full of foaming.

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Driving at night through the snow of the city,
I hear the story the City of Snow—
Father must have told it forty times;
Under those drifts, how I fell to sleeping.

CAESAR'S EPILEPSY

That apple has a seedy heart
That Eve gave to Adam's tooth;
Caesar fell upon that truth
When Brutus picked his needy heart.

For what? For Caesar, thrice kinged,
Was three times doffer of the crown,
And leaner Caesar each time round;
Fallen Caesar bit his tongue.

Saint Brutus split the fruit apart
But seeded Rome in triplicate.
The wood of knowledge from that cut,
He cleaned the blade on his own heart.

And Antony, when his foam, his noise
Had pitched Rome on a russet heap,
Struck camp but to pitch and weep
And rise and fall in Egypt's knees.

The snake that weaned us from God's heart
Forgot its foreboding fruit
When mother Cleopatra brought
Its tooth to her forbidden heart.

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DOROTHY ROBERTS

Midway

She was lost in the wood because a few leaves fell,
They fell and changed the pattern of the wood,
A wind rustled and a few leaves fell, yellow,
And she looked around and her heart thumped,
And there she stood.

Pools of light brightened a little where the leaves fell,
She put out a hand to one and the sun was good,
Good as it is when the breath of indirection
Mellows its light; but where was she in the wood?

She was lost and she looked around and her heart darted
Wildly for the light pools that perhaps would tell
Which way the sun and if the sun were followed
Where she would come to, where if a leaf fell
Right at her feet and yellow leaves were a pathway,
Where if a wind rustled and more leaves fell.

Shadows and Snow

Put in a spell things cease for awhile to continue,
but the moon continues and the sun
so the shadows continue
on the otherwise still land draped all in whiteness
that takes the shadow as the thing outlaid and meticulous
and the thing just as the shape for the shadow to grow from.
Shadow and light alone move here, the silence
creaks with the weight of the one force, cold,
over surface lifted so high that tips are the treasure
calling attention to a world
where shadow and substance join hands making shadow the
more active
in that it moves with the moon and the rest stays silent
balancing its snow.
Contours are shadowy too and the wind that left them
leaves itself asleep in their form.

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B. H. HAGGIN

Rudolf Bing's Metropolitan

BERNARD SHAW'S EXPLANATION OF HIS FAILURE to attend a performance of Brahms's *German Requiem* was that listening to this work was one of the sacrifices which should not be demanded twice from any man; and that was the way I felt about Strauss's *Die Frau ohne Schatten,* which the Metropolitan produced this year. But I contend further that there are some sacrifices which should not be demanded of a critic even once; and after Samuel Barber's opera *Vanessa,* nothing could get me into the Metropolitan for his *Antony and Cleopatra.* This was true even before I read what was written about it; and when I read Stanley Kauffmann's report in *The New Republic* I accepted his characterization of the work as a "pseudo *Aida*" produced by the "unmemorable operatic talent" that had produced "the MGM soundtrack score of *Vanessa,*" since I knew that pseudo music in every genre was what Barber had produced all along—not only the pseudo opera *Vanessa,* but the pseudo Piano Sonata, and the pseudo Piano Concerto that placed him, for the ears of Winthrop Sargeant, "head and shoulders above all the other American composers whose work one is likely to encounter on current symphonic programs."

Commenting further, Kauffmann thought the primary point was not Barber's lack of talent but "the very idea of commissioning an American opera." For "there has never been an American opera composer of consequence; there is no American operatic tradition of consequence; and, if socio-cultural history and portents can be read, we can say flatly there never will be an American opera of consequence." Certainly, nothing done by Virgil Thomson's predecessors provided him with a point of departure, a basis, for what he did; but with complete disregard of Kauffmann's Law, Thomson's own gifts enabled him to envision his own untraditional objectives and realize them in two operas of consequence, *Four Saints in Three Acts* and *The Mother of Us All.* Nor were they the only ones: Aaron Copland's *The Tender Land* was another work of consequence in which he certainly did not take off from the worthless American operas that preceded his at the City Center and the Metropolitan, but which nevertheless, in the absence of an American operatic tradition, he was able to achieve with his own gifts. And so I don't think we can say flatly that such exercises of personal gifts will not occur again and will not give us additional operas of consequence—even, possibly, an opera in a style suitable for the Metropolitan, which Thomson's and Copland's operas were not.

Continuing, Kauffmann doubted that Bing and his associates "really believe that Barber is a valuable opera composer and that opera in anything like the tradition of European opera can be written

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in this country. . . . I do not think they are so ignorant. I think they commissioned Barber *despite* their knowledge of these matters: because they wanted an American work to open an opera house in America." And he was depressed by this act of "empty obeisance to presumed cultural and social demands." But Kauffmann was again speaking with disregard of the facts that contradicted him. The Bing who commissioned *Antony and Cleopatra* for the new Metropolitan was the Bing who produced *Vanessa* at the old Metropolitan, and not only Barber's *Vanessa* but Menotti's *The Last Savage,* and who produced these operas not in obedience to institutional demands, but because he himself believed Barber and Menotti were good composers and their operas were worth producing—which is to say, because he *was* as ignorant as Kauffmann thought he was not. A man with the "knowledge of these matters" that Kauffmann credited Bing with would have said: "It would be fine to open this American opera house with an American opera; but the only good American operas so far are not suitable for the occasion; and I don't know any American composer who would produce a good opera in a suitable style; therefore I must give up the idea of opening the new American opera house with an American opera." It was a man without this understanding who really thought that the idea of opening the new American opera house with an American opera could be carried out successfully by commissioning the composer of *Vanessa* to write *Antony and Cleopatra.* Indeed, the point to make about Bing's commissioning Barber to write this huge empty work, and his getting Zeffirelli to contrive for it the monstrosity of designing and staging that Kauffmann described, was that they merely provided the most monumental demonstration of what Bing had demonstrated repeatedly in the past on a smaller scale: namely, that he is a man of no artistic understanding, judgment and taste.

I am, then, challenging the contrary image of Bing propagated by the writers who have accepted his own idea of himself and his operation and have embodied it in the ostensible news reports in weekly news magazines, articles in *The New York Times Magazine,* and profile in *The New Yorker,* that actually have been little more than publicity stories. These writers have used the technique I first encountered forty years ago in a *New Republic* article by Deems Taylor on the occasion of Walter Damrosch's resigning as conductor of the New York Symphony.[1] Taylor's way of dealing with Damrosch's admittedly "listless performances of the classics" was to write: "He can sometimes make Tchaikovsky dull and Beethoven unbearable. But I have never heard him miss a cue, or allow wrong notes"; and also "I have never heard him give a bad performance of difficult or un-

[1] One wonders why *The New Republic* considered this article something to exhibit with pride in the magazine's anthology, *Faces of Five Decades.* And the same with the other article on music in the collection, Paul Rosenfeld's on Stravinsky's *Le Sacre du Printemps,* a characteristic prose fantasia about "the rhythms of machinery" that had, with Stravinsky, "entered musical art"—something Stravinsky doesn't mention in his account of the writing of *Le Sacre.*

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familiar music"—which was to say, Tchaikovsky and Beethoven were at fault for being too familiar and easy. And in his *New Yorker* profile Joseph Wechsberg wrote that Bing "has been known to deal quite roughly with some of his top stars," but that "he has rarely been accused of uncharitable behavior toward singers of lower rank" (who, he didn't add, were not in a position to make accusations), and that one well-known performer had said, "With Bing you always know where you stand, even if the knowledge is not always pleasant." Moreover the rough treatment, as Wechsberg told it, was a necessary disciplinary measure—for example, on the occasions when a singer reported himself or herself hoarse or voiceless and unable to sing. Wechsberg told it as Bing told it, recounting Bing's description of a typical visit to the singer, who is found "sitting next to a phonograph listening to an electronically beautified rendition of the glorious voice," and who "makes desperate, silent gestures intended to convey to Bing that . . . there is just no voice left," but who "in the end . . . may be persuaded to make a supreme effort to save the performance. 'Usually he or she sings very well,' Bing concluded acidly." Thus Wechsberg accepted Bing's contention that in the typical incident the singer's claim to be incapacitated was fraudulent. And he described actual incidents of such fraudulent claims—presumably told to him by Bing—in which Bing had acted with justified ruthlessness. I have no doubt that there have been incidents such as Bing described. But on the other hand I have no doubt that there were also the incidents described to me some years ago by a former member of the Metropolitan's administrative staff, in the course of telling me what had happened between Bing and Callas: incidents in which the singer did have laryngitis, and Bing used the decisive method of "persuasion" omitted from his description of the typical incident—that of taking out his watch and giving the ailing singer three minutes to decide whether to sing that night or not sing again at the Metropolitan.

"Bing is not offended," Wechsberg wrote, "when people say the Metropolitan is a dictatorship. He thinks it has to be one." But what my informant said about Bing's treatment of ailing singers, and of Callas, was not that he was a dictator, but that he was a bully. Wechsberg's statement about the Callas episode was "Bing fired Callas in 1958 after a feud that made front-page headlines in the *Times*"—which was not an adequate description of what my informant told me had happened. Callas was to sing in the Metropolitan's first production of Verdi's *Macbeth;* and Bing notified her, several months in advance of her arrival, that he was scheduling her also in *La Traviata.* She replied that she could not sing *La Traviata* in alternation with *Macbeth* because of the different demands they made on the voice. Her reason was a real and good one; she was telling him months in advance; and the situation, said my informant, was one that arose constantly in an opera company and was always dealt with in the same way: one waited for the singer to arrive, and settled the difference

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privately with persuasion and mutual accommodation. But Bing did not wait, and demanded Callas's submission; and when she refused it, he gave himself the satisfaction not just of the assertion of power in firing her, but of making the assertion of this power a public one. He could indulge himself in this way because he had another singer for *Macbeth;* when he has had to submit to the demands or the misbehavior of a singer he needed, he hasn't publicized the fact. Someone who was present told me how, as a rehearsal was about to start, Leonard Warren stepped forward and informed Mitropoulos that he had his own ideas about how to sing his aria in that act and would expect Mitropoulos to conduct in accordance with his singing—clearly a situation which called for Bing to make an appearance, take out his watch and give Warren three minutes in which to decide whether he would sing as Mitropoulos conducted or not sing at all; but Bing didn't appear. As the incident developed, the orchestra made a gesture of solidarity with Mitropoulos, angering Warren and causing him to express his disrespect for the orchestra, which thereupon left the pit. Clearly another reason for Bing to discipline Warren; but still Bing didn't appear; and it was a representative of the musicians' union who compelled Warren to apologize to the orchestra. Mitropoulos, who had only Bing to protect him from Warren's arrogance, got no apology.

With conductors too, as Wechsberg told it—which is to say, as Bing told it to him—what Bing did, he had reason to do. "He dismissed several conductors when he took over the Met, and others quit. One conductor wanted the right to cast a work (a prerogative that Bing has always claimed for himself); another wanted a premiere (which Bing was unwilling to give him); and a third wanted not only to conduct but to produce a very popular work (which seemed to Bing too much of a risk)." What *I* was told was that one of the conductors when Bing took over in 1950, Jonel Perlea, had come to the Metropolitan (from La Scala) the preceding season, when Bing was there as an observer, and had greatly impressed the public and press with his conducting of *Rigoletto, La Traviata, Carmen* and *Tristan und Isolde;* and that Bing offered Perlea for the next season nothing but twenty performances of *Die Fledermaus,* in this way compelling him to resign. Also that Fritz Reiner, who conducted the premiere of Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress,* waited for the offer that would enable him to leave, which came in 1953 from the Chicago Symphony. And that George Szell, engaged in 1953 to prepare and conduct the new production of *Tannhäuser,* walked out after conducting one or two performances because of what he called differences with management, which I was told were concerned with Bing's having made changes in the rehearsed cast without consulting Szell or giving him an opportunity to rehearse the new singers. Casting is something a conductor of the stature of Szell would usually be consulted about; what is extraordinary, since Bing is not a musician, is his claiming of all casting,

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from major roles down to the jailer in *Tosca,* as his exclusive prerogative—one feature of the dictatorship that has him "personally involved in every major or minor decision" in the company's operation.

But as Wechsberg told the history of opera, an opera director who was not a musician but nevertheless made the musical decisions had historical logic and inevitability, and made sense in the opera house of today. The era of singer-dominated performance was followed by that of conductor-dominated performance, inaugurated by Toscanini; but Toscanini, according to Wechsberg, "was interested mostly in the musical aspects of the lyric theater," and it was only in the early nineteen-twenties that stage direction became important, leading to the designer- and director-dominated performance of recent years. Hence, according to Wechsberg, there was need now of someone who was neither a conductor nor a designer or director to mediate disinterestedly between the two. Moreover opera production had become so complex that "the managing of a modern opera house requires not only artistic judgment and a sound knowledge of music but also a high degree of executive skill," which a conductor or stage director is not likely to have. Hence the present-day opera director—exemplified by Sir David Webster of London's Royal Opera and Rudolf Bing of the Metropolitan—who is neither a musician nor a stage director but a skillful administrator with the necessary knowledge of music and artistic judgment. And Bing was pictured as the administrator who not only ran the company's business operation efficiently and imposed on singers and conductors a discipline that substituted order for the earlier confusion, but was able to exercise over-all artistic direction—one important exercise of it having been his improvement of the staging of opera at the Metropolitan by bringing in prominent designers and directors from the dramatic theater, making them equal in rank and authority with the conductor, and retaining the final authority needed to decide conflicts between them.

Actually, Sir David Webster is General Manager of the Royal Opera with George Solti as Musical Director; and in the past Toscanini was Musical Director of La Scala with Gatti-Casazza handling its administration. Actually, too, the visual elements of an opera production had great importance for Toscanini and received his close attention; and he had strong convictions about them which not only were evident in his own productions but were expressed in his occasional comment on others. When he saw, in a 1934 production of *Falstaff* in Vienna, a first scene of Act 3 which had Falstaff warming himself not in the sun outside the inn but under a mountain of bedclothes in his bedroom, he denounced the *"criminali"* who changed the work of Boito and Verdi; and when that bedroom appeared again in Salzburg the following summer at a rehearsal of the production he was to conduct, he walked out of the theater, and came back only when the correct outdoor set was substituted. In other words, he applied to the visual elements the principle of strict fidelity to the composer's wishes that

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governed his treatment of the music. And his 1929 La Scala production of *Lucia di Lammermoor* exhibited in its naturalistic scenery, as well as in the musical performance, a fidelity to the style and conventions of the work which indicated his belief that it was possible and right to make such a work valid and convincing to an audience of today by respecting and giving effect to its own style and conventions—as against the contention that for an audience of today one had to give such a work a contemporary scenic style embodying a contemporary idea of its dramatic content (no more necessary with an opera of Donizetti than it is to modernize a novel or a painting of the same period). Moreover, Toscanini's 1929 *Lucia* exhibited in its stage action an understanding of the conventions imposed by the very nature of *dramma per musica,* as against drama through the words and action of a play—the most important being that an aria or ensemble in an opera is a point where action stops and music takes over. So with the *Falstaff, Fidelio, Meistersinger* and *Magic Flute* that Toscanini conducted in Salzburg: they were made unforgettable not only by his conducting of the music but by the staging that embodied his correct understanding of what the very nature of opera dictated in its presentation on the stage.

Undoubtedly, then, and rightly, Toscanini would have denounced what has been done by some of the stage designers and directors brought in by Bing who have regarded their task as being not to employ their skills in the effective realization of the explicit requirements of the opera, but instead to use the opera for the exercise of their skills in a striking or bizarre piece of stagecraft, without regard for the opera's requirements that it sacrificed. An early and extreme example was the unit set for the 1953 *Don Giovanni*—with its house front on each side, and its rising and curving ramp filling most of the stage and impeding most of the action—which resulted in sheer absurdities like Don Giovanni giving a ball or having supper in the middle of the street. A recent one is the permanent sloping platform of the current *Faust,* which works for the several outdoor scenes but not for the three interior scenes of the last act, so that Marguerite is seen not hiding from her neighbors in her house but walking about in her garden, and finally imprisoned in a huge stage space open on all sides. In between there have been the earlier *Faust,* relocated in the early nineteenth century, with its garden scene lacking the house which Faust addressed as *"demeure chaste et pure,"* and which the action required, so that one did not, at the end of the scene, see Marguerite enter the house, open a window and sing dreamily of her love, while Faust watched and listened outside, but instead saw her merely hurry off the stage and then return to it; the *Forza del Destino* with its three Velletri scenes combined into one, with the absurd result that one saw Don Alvaro carried out on a stretcher badly wounded, and a few minutes later saw him walk back into the same scene fully recovered; the *Macbeth* with its last two scenes combined into one, with

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the result that Macbeth heard the women's cries at Lady Macbeth's death not as he sat in an adjoining room but as he stood on the plain outside the castle; the modern-style arrangement of bare platforms and ramps in the final scene of *Die Meistersinger,* incongruous after the naturalistic sets of the preceding scenes, and necessitating changes in the stage action that made it less effective. And there have been productions exemplifying the tendency of present-day designer-director teams to concern themselves with ideas that never entered the composer's head, while they disregard his explicit demands. One of these was the *Salome* in which the "passage of the huge, carbuncular moon" was intended to suggest "not only the decline of Jochanaan's fortunes but the moment of transition from a pagan to a Christian era"—this seemingly requiring Herod to leave his banquet hall to sit not on the terrace of his palace, as Strauss writes, but in its back yard (a clutter of platforms and steps on which the sitting and all the action was difficult), and Narraboth to kill himself some distance away from Salome, in disregard of Strauss's directions and the dramatic point they are intended to achieve—that Narraboth's act is done before the eyes of Salome which, fixed on Jochanaan, do not see it. Another was the *Lucia,* with its enormously cluttered stage pictures whose "architectural framework . . . mounted on mobile platforms which create continuously changing ambience and perspective [symbolize] the irrational element which parallels the transformation and final disintegration of Lucia's mind," and with its excessive stage activity introduced by the director, a former dancer and choreographer who, like the directors Bing brought in from the dramatic stage, had the mistaken idea that there must be something happening on the stage at every moment, and converted the famous sextet into an accompaniment for the continuing movement and grouping of lords and ladies and soldiers.

Toscanini would have denounced not only the designers and directors who presumed to change the composers' works in these ways, but the man who made it possible for them to do so. For Bing's operation has not been what he got Wechsberg to describe it as—the Diaghilev-like dictatorship of a man of artistic understanding and taste whose mediation between conductors and designer-director teams has produced examples of musical performance and stage production in ideal harmony. The productions I have cited show that he has sided with the designers and directors even in their worst extravagances; and the monstrosities he has presented prove him to be not only without understanding of the special requirements of opera but without taste. If anyone points out that there have been occasional beautiful productions, and argues that the man who gave us the marvelous 1957 *Don Giovanni* designed by Eugene Berman must be conceded to have taste, my answer is to insist that the man who gave us the monstrous 1953 *Don Giovanni* must be conceded to be without taste, and to point out that it was possible for this man

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without taste to give us the marvelous *Don Giovanni* of 1957. For as I see it, what Bing has done has been to engage all the prominent designers around, good and bad, and accept whatever they did—now something as monstrous as the *Don Giovanni* of 1953, and now something as beautiful as the one of 1957; or now this beautiful *Don Giovanni,* and now the hideous *Salome;* or, in one production of *Die Meistersinger,* the early scenes in naturalistic style, and with them the incongruous modern-style arrangement of bare platforms and ramps of the final scene. The same with the stage directors whom Bing has brought in from the dramatic theater, and from whom he has accepted now something as good as the *Don Carlo,* and now something as bad as the *Lucia* or the *Falstaff* or the *Marriage of Figaro.* And the lack of understanding of the special requirements of operatic staging that caused Bing to accept these major examples of constant and excessive stage activity has led him to accept bad details of that kind. Toscanini—who would have understood that during *Non ti fidar,* in *Don Giovanni,* the audience's attention must be concentrated on the phrases that are being sung by the four principals in the foreground—would not have tolerated any stage business in the background that distracted this attention; but Bing, who doesn't understand, did tolerate the distracting coming and going of peasants during this piece. Toscanini—who would have understood that Verdi wrote the Prelude to Act 1 of *Aida* for the audience to hear while the curtain was down, to prepare its mind for what it would see and hear when the curtain rose—might have allowed the first scene to become visible during the piece, but would not have tolerated the distracting procession of priests across the stage; but Bing, who doesn't understand, did tolerate this meaningless and distracting stage activity. (And one didn't have to have the understanding of Toscanini to perceive and correct two absurd details after the curtain rose: Rhadames's exclaiming *"Dessa!"* supposedly at the sight of Aida, when she hadn't yet appeared on the stage, and then her entering at a point different from the one he was looking toward; but the Bing eye, for which we have been told no detail is too small, didn't perceive and correct these two.)

The Bing method applied to singers brought to the Metropolitan now a celebrated singer as outstanding as George London or Renata Tebaldi or Carlo Bergonzi, and now one as appalling as Mario Del Monaco. It didn't bring the celebrated Elisabeth Schwarzkopf until she had little left to make her worth bringing; and one news magazine reported her as saying that Bing had indeed invited her some years earlier, but to sing Tatiana in Tchaikovsky's *Eugene Onegin* in English—which, if true, provided only the most ludicrous example of his lack of competence for the casting he maintained as his prerogative. Another example was the choice he finally made of the singer for Tatiana: Lucine Amara, who was wholly unsuited for the role in appearance, personality and voice. Other major examples I recall were

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the repeated assignment of Margaret Harshaw to the role of Donna Anna, for which her unpleasant voice and her lack of the agility required by *Non mi dir* were disastrous; his similar persistence with the inadequate Mary Curtis Verna. And he continued for years to assign Zinka Milanov to Verdi roles for which she had only the tremulous, unpleasant shreds of her once beautiful voice.

As for repertory—outside of the main body of standard repertory, that is—Bing did give us Stravinsky's *The Rake's Progress,* Berg's *Wozzeck* (but in English), Musorgsky's own *Boris Godunov.* But he later replaced this *Boris* with the Shostakovitch version, which falsified Musorgsky's work no less than the Rimsky-Korsakov. And he produced other works besides Barber's *Vanessa* and Menotti's *The Last Savage* that should not have been produced: Flotow's *Martha,* which I doubt that one can hear even in a German opera house today; Cilèa's *Adrianna Lecouvreur,* for which Tebaldi's insistence was not sufficient justification; European operettas—Johann Strauss's *Die Fledermaus* and *The Gypsy Baron,* Offenbach's *La Périchole*—which are no more the proper business of an opera company than are *Show Boat* or *Brigadoon.* In reply to the newspaper reviewers who criticized him for not producing contemporary works, as even the smaller European opera companies did, Bing pointed out that government subsidies enabled the European companies to produce works which only a small part of the public was interested in, whereas the Metropolitan, without such subsidy, could invest the cost of a new production only in an opera which the public's interest would keep in the repertory eight or ten seasons. But what he said the Metropolitan couldn't invest in a contemporary work it invested in *Martha, Adrianna Lecouvreur* and *The Gypsy Baron,* which couldn't have been expected to last longer than the one season they did.

What Bing did last September was entirely in line with what I have been describing. An opera director with knowledge and taste, looking for something special with which to inaugurate the new opera house, might have remembered Berlioz's *The Trojans* and realized that this was exactly the work for the occasion. Bing carried his operation of the previous sixteen years to its logical climax by inaugurating the house with the Zeffirelli production of Barber's *Antony and Cleopatra.*

My first visit to the new Metropolitan, then, was made for the new production of *La Traviata.* I was interested not only in the production itself, but in what it would reveal about the new house; and after Philharmonic Hall and the New York State Theater it was a relief to hear the natural, warm sound of sufficient volume that reached my ear in row Y of the Orchestra (at an Opera Guild rehearsal I heard similar sound in row E of the Dress Circle). In this respect, indeed, the new Metropolitan is superior not only to the other two Lincoln Center theaters but to the old Metropolitan, whose acoustical deficiencies

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were reason enough not to preserve it. And after the curtain rose there was evidence of the new house's superior stage facilities—more evidence, in fact, than Verdi's opera needed. For this *La Traviata* was another of the productions that would justify the credit line in the program, "Entire production personally supervised by Rudolf Bing"—one, that is, for which he chose Cecil Beaton as designer, Alfred Lunt as stage director, Georges Prêtre to conduct, and Anna Moffo, Bruno Prevedi, Robert Merrill and the rest to sing; and it had the defects of the others. Beaton provided for the parties of the first and third acts spectacular sets—the second with a double grand staircase—which seemed excessive for the salons of two Parisian demi-mondaines, even luxurious salons frequented by barons and marquises; and the bedroom of the last act was implausibly huge. But what Toscanini would have denounced was the transferring of Act 2 from the specified drawing room in a country house to an outdoor area between the house and the barn. What dramatic purpose and advantage this was intended to achieve I was unable to discover; but I did appreciate the absurdity of the elder Germont exclaiming "Such luxury!" as he glanced not at the rich furnishings of a drawing room but at some pieces of garden furniture, and of Violetta answering him by handing him a document that she didn't take from a drawer in her desk but picked up from the garden table. And I continued to feel the need of a room—for the intimate conversations, the writing of letters, the entrances and exists—instead of the outdoor space. Moreover, though Lunt's staging was skillful and effective, it included one piece of invention which I am sure Toscanini wouldn't have tolerated: Violetta's beginning to dance with Baron Douphol, and, if I remember correctly, the rest of the company joining them, as Alfredo sang *"Libiamo"*. It made a fine stage effect, but contradicted the words introducing the song: Alfredo is asked for a toast, after Baron Douphol has refused; he asks Violetta if she would like it, and she says yes; the Marquis asks for everyone's attention; the chorus shouts, "Yes, attention to the singer!"—all of which requires Violetta and the others to listen to Alfredo's song, not to ignore it by beginning to dance. Much worse, however, were the consequences of the musical decisions that Bing reserved to himself—not only the choice of Prevedi for the role of Alfredo, in which he produced some unpleasant sounds, but, more important, the choice of Prêtre for a work of Verdi, which he conducted with no feeling for the Verdian *espansione* needed to give it rhetorical effect, and with nothing in its place that gave the work coherence and shape.

There is no space left for the Metropolitan's new *Lohengrin,* the New York City Opera's new *La Traviata* and *Julius Caesar,* the New York City Ballet's opening weeks, a few concerts, and Virgil Thomson's *Virgil Thomson,* which I will report on next time.

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LUCY R. LIPPARD

Eros Presumptive

IDEALLY, EROTICISM IN THE VISUAL ARTS is a curious combination of specific and generalized sensation. Universally understood rhythms or symbols become meaningful only to the individual viewer. In this sense, the erotic is always particular, but its very particularities alter depending upon who views them, when, and how. Recognition of obvious erotic subject matter, or any subject matter at all, can be beside the point. The broader the framework within which the erogenous forms or surfaces occur, the greater its appeal to a greater number of people. The possibility of abstract eroticism may seem far-fetched, but with few exceptions, the best erotica being made today is abstract to a greater or lesser degree, concentrating on a purity of sensation which in turn engenders a stronger response. It can be argued that abstraction is by definition an intellectualized perception and hence removed from the immediacy of the sensual, and there will be connoisseurs who will cry pedanticism! and castration! at the very mention of a totally abstract eroticism. Yet it would seem that an audience visually sophisticated enough to appreciate and at times prefer non-objective works of arts as concrete objects in themselves, rather than associative look-alikes, will also prefer the heightened sensation that can be achieved by an abstractly sensuous object.

The following remarks are general, but they were inspired in part by two recent and entirely unsatisfying (on every level) art exhibitions purporting to expose contemporary erotica. The first opened the fall season at the Sidney Janis Gallery, and consisted largely of pop and quasi pop art; the second, which took place in December at the Nycata Gallery, eliminated with its title ("Hetero Is") the homosexual segment of the Janis show, but was esthetically speaking still more indiscriminate. Also last fall, the Fischbach Gallery held a group sculpture show entitled "Eccentric Abstraction" in which sensuous and broadly erotic qualities were far more conspicuous than in the unprurient peep show up the street at Janis, which received an exaggerated amount of journalistic attention. Many observers noted with lip-licking anticipation that this was going to be the "Erotic Season", like the Pop, Op, Primary Structure Seasons past. For at least two years rumors have been rife of wickedness stored up in the studios waiting for the Trend to break. It never has, and won't, for the simple reason that subject matter without style does not make a trend. And most of the erotic art that has appeared so far is bad art, inept art, trite art, even dull art—third rate Pop and warmed over neo-Surrealism for the most part. Both the Janis and the Nycata organizers showed a distinct concern for titillation, but it remained

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unfulfilled because of lack of either courage, taste or material—perhaps all three. The former was attended, incidentally, by a surprising, and amusing, number of clearly non-art visitors—well-dressed men whose occasional snickers belied their apparent sophistication, but who were obviously disappointed, like the reviewer who observed that it was more hard-edge than hard-on, or more put-on than take-off.

Obviously the individual nature of the erotic response precludes any conclusions on the subject, but in this day of obscenity trials and 42nd Street stag movies, the contradictory effects of the erotic arts are worth investigating. For instance, why have so few art shows been raided, while books and films are constantly banned? Perhaps because one picture can *not* replace a thousand words? Sexual stimulation, response, and activity are sequential. A book, proceeding in time, is more likely to provoke the rhythms of this sequence than a single painting or sculpture, viewing of which is more vulnerable to outside distractions. A book even has the additional advantage over film (the most potentially potent erotic art form) in that it permits the imaginative reader more scope for personal fantasy, substitution of faces and settings drawn from the reader's own experience or subconscious, while the picture is a finished and self-contained object complete in itself; one detail might destroy the attraction for any single viewer. On the other hand, pornography or a genuine erotic art intended primarily to arouse, is perhaps best served by painting, or rather by illustration, since it is more "instructive," conducive to imitation, like the pillow books. One of the problems of current figurative erotica is the fact that it so rarely transcends illustration, and when it does, it tends to lose its sensuous appeal in the process. Illustration, and to some extent any figuration, is easily exhausted in evocative terms. The abstract artist has an advantage in that he can focus and expand, in several simultaneous directions, the sensuous element that may be submerged in anecdote or decoration within a representational context.

I wrote recently that because of its abstraction there was no such thing as pornographic or truly erotic music. But I may be mistaken. Music sets a mood in the same manner as a picture of a scene, or a scene described in a book. The least tangible of the arts, it nevertheless has as much hold on the emotions, and therefore the senses, as any other, and it is, of course, the rhythmic and sequential art par excellence. Plato worried about "lascivious music," equating it with "vulgar and lawless innovation," and spoke of music freeing men from fear: "the absence of fear begets shamelessness" (*Laws* II, 700-701). There is today a dominant group of abstract painters and sculptors equally opposed to the sensuous, the Dionysian, or for that matter any reference to life, biology, anthropomorphism in art. Stylistically, the artists working in abstraction with sensuous and erotic overtones, some of whom were in the Fischbach show, are allied to the "neo-platonic" structurists. But by refusing to rule out all instinctive

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and sensuous effects, they take a position sympathetic but basically opposed to the structurists' conceptual rigor and literalism. Many makers of sensuous abstraction are wholly uninterested in eroticism per se, but their work includes general allusive factors that recall aspects of non-literary Surrealism and, indirectly, of sexual activity. When Keith Sonnier made two identical triangular forms, one of white cotton duck, one of white painted wood, and connected them by an accordian-like tube, he presented geometric and organic form without departing from geometry. The soft shape inflates and deflates very slowly, and while the implication is forcibly understated, the process of distention and release are easily associated with the erotic act.

Jean Linder's six and a half foot high booth of soft white and clear vinyl, shown this winter at the Whitney Annual, is painted with rhythmic patterns overtly sexual in origin. It takes little imagination or knowledge to translate the labyrinthine images on the sloping wall and floor; they have been common since neolithic times. Nevertheless, the labyrinth is not central to the sculpture's attraction. The booth is an abstract environment that produces unmistakably familiar sensations attachable to, though not necessarily interpretable as erotic. Its combination of open and closed space provides a concrete analogy, full scale, of sensuous experience. Because of its physical presence, sculpture is a more suitable medium for erotica than painting. The Surrealists, with their objects of affection and disaffection, were among the first to apply Freudian object identification to works of art, though they were anticipated to some extent by Ruskin, who noted that "sculpture is essentially the production of a bossiness or pleasant roundness". Younger artists today, however, no longer depend on symbols, dream images, and the "reconciliation of distant realities"; they minimize the allusive factor in an attempt to fuse formal and evocative elements. Ideally, form and content are an obsolete dualism. Union of the two is particularly important to erotic art, and in this regard McLuhan's "medium is the message (massage)" can be swallowed whole. Materials, or medium, become more important when pure sensation is stressed over interpretive symbolism or the realistic portrayal of recognizable objects. Don Potts, at Fischbach, has employed fur and leather—traditionally evocative materials —in such a formally valid manner that the luxury surfaces lose their literary connotations and are fused with the understated ebb and flow of the sculptures themselves. By eliminating reality as an intermediary, sensuous immediacy is intensified.

The most effective erotica of the first half of the 20th century already depended upon mood, supported by strong esthetic/formal devices, and upon generalized association rather than realistic rendition. Balthus and Max Ernst, for example, rarely found it necessary to be anatomically graphic in their erotic fantasies of the 1930's. The *ambiance* of the former's pantomimes of adolescent sexuality and the

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latter's exotic collage novels are more erotically charged than the endless and graphic procession of lurid neo-surrealist collages and paintings by which current erotic art shows are sustained. By the 1950's, a new attitude emerged which took the blatant representation of supposedly erotic subject matter to extremes of the absurd. Mere representation of genitalia, breasts, thighs, sado-masochistic paraphernalia, new positions, have little erotic or even pornographic force in an era of topless nightclubs and girlie advertising. In 1951, Marcel Duchamp, who had already exhibited an ordinary urinal in 1917, made a totally realistic (but unfamiliar and consequently abstract) cast of the imprint of a vulva in bronze *(Feuille de vigne femelle)* and some ten years later, Robert Morris imprinted penis and vulva in lead reliefs, as well as making a box relief which opens a door to reveal a photograph of the artist—expressionless, stark and frontally naked. Comparison of these works and Giacometti's *Disagreeable Object* of 1931 clarifies the change. *Object* is Surrealist, consciously subconsciously inspired, bristling, literally, with erotic violence and hostility. There is nothing erotic about Morris' objects, nor was there about a still more radical gesture he made in a dance piece where he and Yvonne Rainer, both nude, and in close but dispassionate embrace, moved mechanically across the stage, neutralizing nudity into a condition like any other condition, embrace into an act like any other act. By such isolation and de-mythologizing of conventional ideas about erotic subject matter, Duchamp, Morris, and others questioned the effect of such subjects. Any residue of sexual stimulus remaining is a strictly cerebral, rather than an emotional or sensuous response.

The abstracting Surrealists (Miró, Masson, Ernst, even Tanguy), and the Abstract Expressionists after them, utilized biomorphic forms for their sexual inferences. If there is nothing definitely erotic in such twining, embracing, swelling and relaxing shapes, there is, nevertheless, a sensuous character inseparable from the broadly understood erotic experience. Visceral shapes do induce a physical identification in most viewers. "Body ego," and narcissism, are implicit in the erotic. Isolation of the caressability, the sensuous attraction (or repulsion) of a form from its particular biological function or anatomical placement frees that form from limited meaning. A bag-like or spherical shape can be read as uterus, breast, testicle, or simple non-allusive form responded to on a purely sensorial level. For a Freudian, of course, such correspondences are endless and omnipresent. As Norman Brown (whose approach to the subject must be taken with a pillar of salt) has suggested: "a penis in every convex object, and a vagina in every concave one" (*Love's Body*, p. 250). From an esthetic point of view, abstraction is capable of broader formal power, since the shapes are not bound to represent any particular thing or coincide in scale with other forms. The experience provoked may relate to, but is not dependent upon the realistic or symbolic origins of the form. This is

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not to say that figurative art cannot be as formally and erotically successful as the abstract, but simply that such distillation is today far more rare in figuration, where erotic subject matter rather than erotic effect tends to dominate the attention.

One of the purest erotic artists working today never deals in abstraction. Claes Oldenburg, though he is represented by Janis, was not included in that exhibition, because, I assume, his utilitarian inanimate objects are not literally sexual. They are, in fact, the contrary of the deadpan anti-eroticism of Morris' reliefs, or Warhol's banana. His capacity for fantasy and the purity of his sensuous approach endow rough cloth or vinyl orange squeezers, Dormeyer mixers, baseball bats or bathtubs with rich and inescapable organic and sexual implications. As eroticism, Oldenburg's works are abstract; the stimuli arise from pure sensation rather than direct association with the objects depicted. His soft sculptures—flexible, kinesthetic, passive, but potentially arousable, potentially dynamic—have a few minor precedents in Surrealist objects from the thirties, but their scale, and wholeness, is incontestably contemporary in spirit. Oldenburg asks for his objects "no standards, no values. I wish to be like Nature—creative but unphilosophic, mindless, machine-like . . . setting an example of how to use the senses."

Mindlessness, and systematization, are characteristic of the art of the mid 60's. Despite its detachment, an aggressive vacuity can es-

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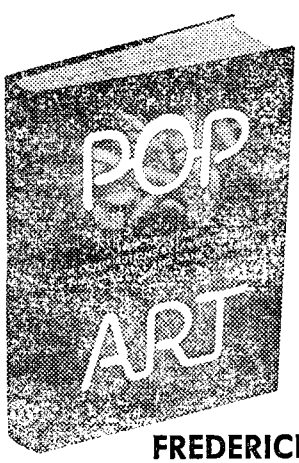

POP ART

By LUCY R. LIPPARD

with contributions by
LAWRENCE ALLOWAY, NICOLAS CALAS and NANCY MARMER

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tablish a tremendous intimacy with the patient viewer. Sex is, after all, the fundamental mystical experience, and the cool tone—deceptively near neutral—of current eroticism is also that of the mainstreams of traditional erotic art. The great precedent is ancient Hindu temple sculpture, the yab/yum of Tantric yoga in which opposites are not conceived as active and passive male and female, but as an incorporation of the two: dynamic male and welcoming static female as well as passive male activated by the dynamic female. On the temple facades, obsessive but precisely constructed pattern is fused with an ineffable sense of volume, physicality, substance. Everything seems in slow motion, the figures freed from an everyday into a timeless reality. While there is no question of direct influence or even interest, analogies can be made with contemporary attitudes, as well as with the purely ornamental arts of the near and far east. Repetition, inactivity, simultaneous detachment and involvement, understatement and self-containment are qualities shared by these arts. Emotive or expressionist energy is foreign to the makers of sensuous abstraction. Artists like Sonnier, or Gary Kuehn with his inactive contrast of a box-like structure and a "melted" fiberglas puddle forming a separate but related section of the same piece, confront opposing aspects of the same form or surface and systematize the resulting concept of change. Facts before and after action are presented unemphatically. As in the classic Indian yoni and lingam sculptures, momentary excitement is omitted in favor of a double-edged experience; opposites are witnesses to the ultimate union or the neutralization of their own opposing characteristics. Hannah Wilke's androgynous terra cotta at the Nycata show, though conceptually less advanced than other works mentioned here, might also serve to illustrate this principle.

The danger is that the decrescendo and crystallization of baroque activity, total union or wholeness applied to the accepted dynamism of sex, can simply drain it of all empathic interest. Yet the rhythms of erotic experience can be slowed to a near standstill and convey all the more effectively a languorous sensuality. In contrast to the expressionist viewpoint—the spontaneous imprisonment of the moment of ecstasy in which paint, form and color are sent spinning in Wagnerian approximation of orgasm—the cool approach depends on pervasive mood, the electric stasis of sexual attraction, the roots rather than the results of desire. The cool sensibility that approves understatement, detachment, the anti-climactic in art, tends to approach the erotic non-romantically, non-subjectively, often even non-metaphorically. Such an approach may be the consequence of something as radical as a change in morality and sexual ethics brought about by the generation now in its twenties and thirties, but sociology aside, it is well served esthetically by an anti-dynamic or at least post-dynamic sensuousness characteristic of provocation, fore or after play, rather than of climax. A controlled voluptuousness, as concerned with the ebb as with the flow of energy, is manifested formally by the predominance of a long

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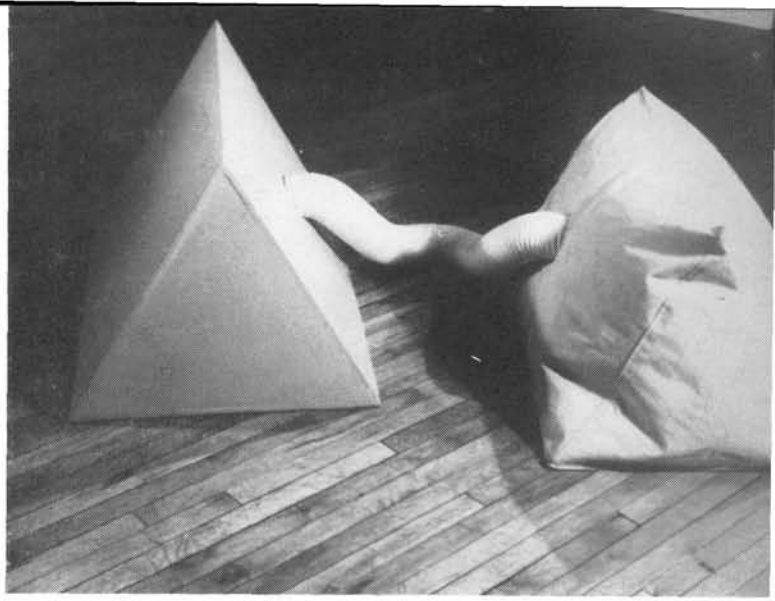

Keith Sonnier
UNTITLED
1966
42" high
Mixed media

Claes Oldenburg
SOFT TUB
1966
80 × 30 × 30"
Vinyl, plexiglas and kapok
(courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery)

Jean Linder
BOOTH
1966
6'5" × 5' × 34"
Vinyl fabrics and clear vinyl painted

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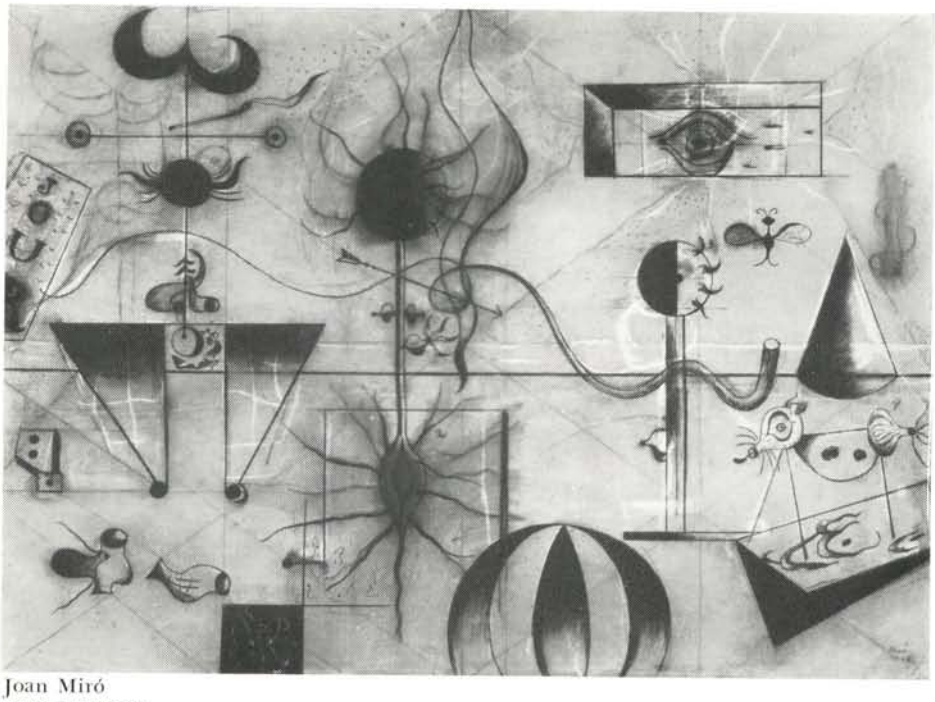
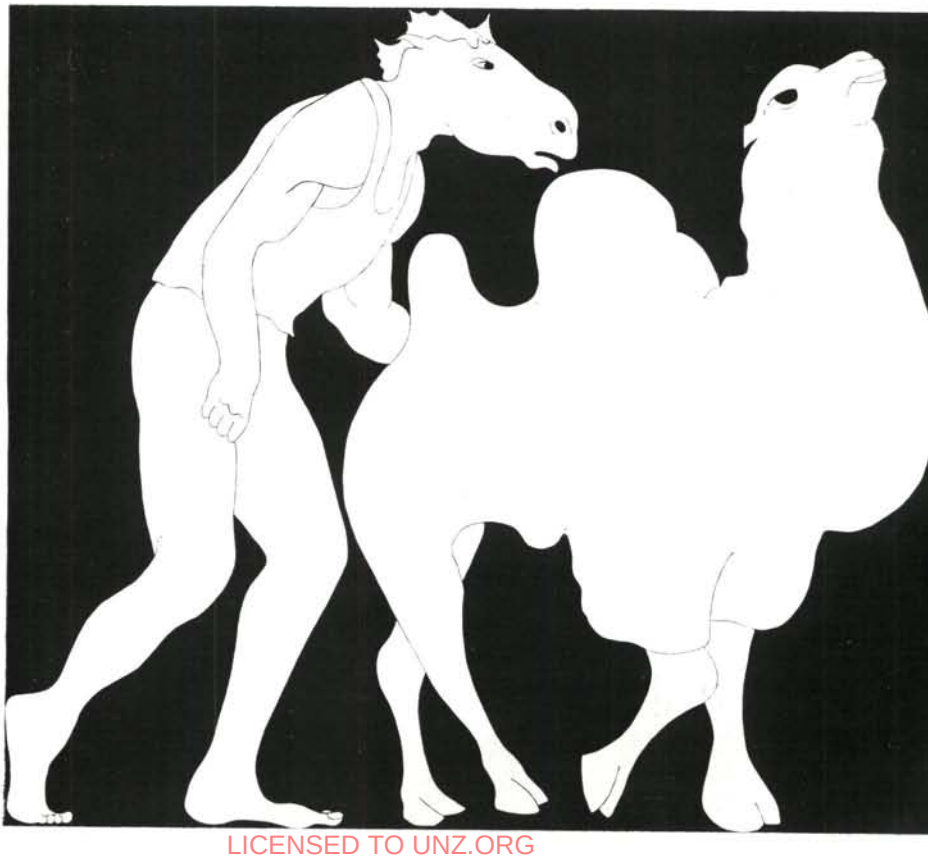


Joan Miró
THE FAMILY
1924
29½ × 41″
Chalk on brown paper
Gift of Mr. and Mrs. Jan Mitchell
(courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art)



John Wesley
CAMEL
1966
40 × 46″
Acrylic
on canvas

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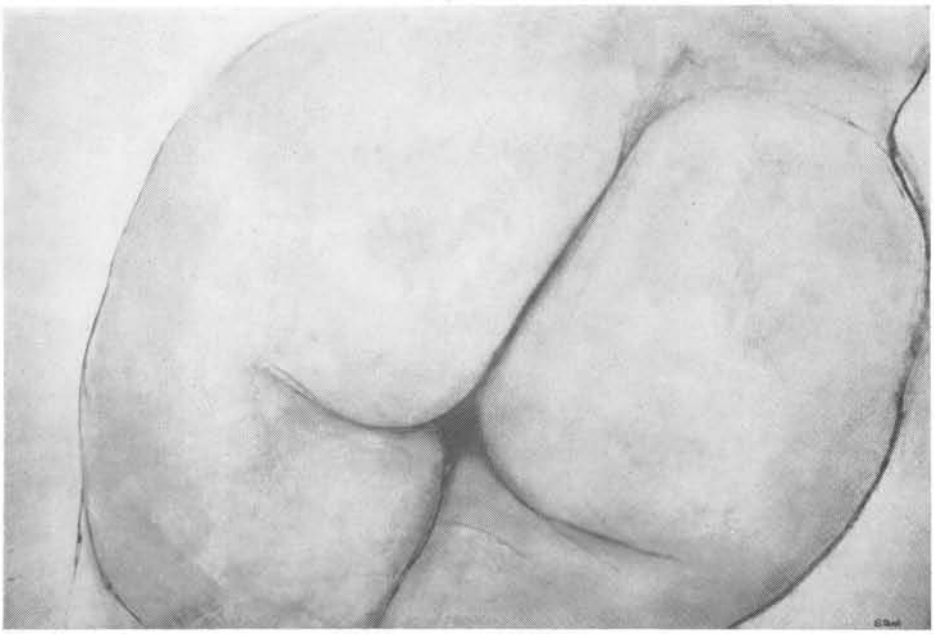
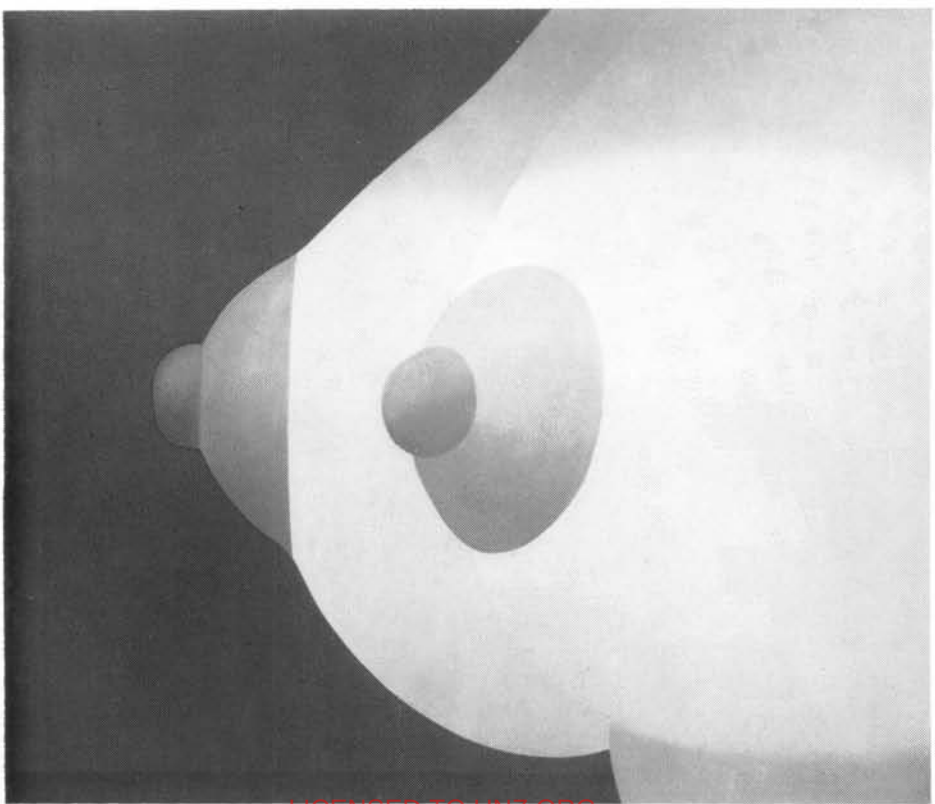


Charles Stark
THOMPSON STREET 5
1965
14 × 21″
Oil and polymer on panel

Tom Wesselmann
SEASCAPE #17 (TWO TITS)
60 × 72″
Oil in canvas
(courtesy of Sidney Janis Gallery)



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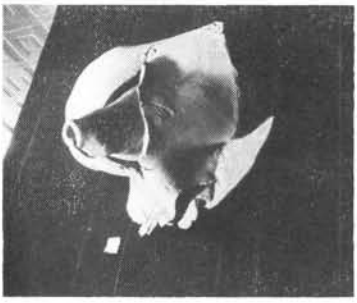
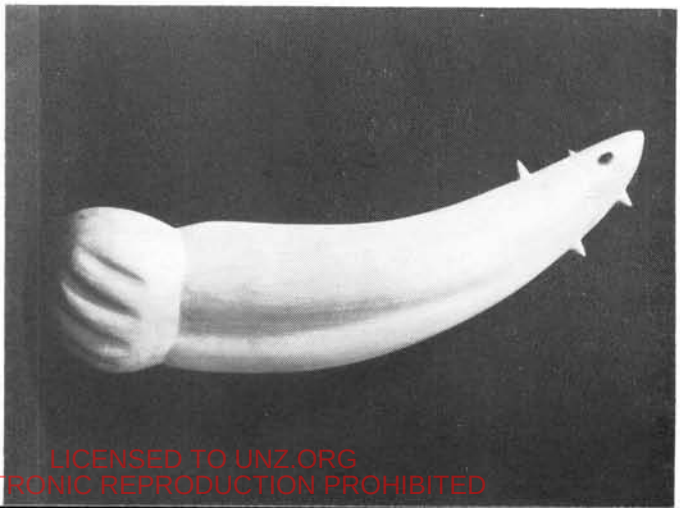
Marcel Duchamp
FEUILLE DE VIGNE FEMELLE
1951
4¾ × 3¼″
Galvanized plaster

Lindsey Decker
PLASTIC CONSTRUCTION NO. II
1965
31½ × 13 × 16″
Acrylic and polyethylene



Hannah Wilke
UNTITLED
1966
13″ high
Terra cotta

Alberto Giacometti
DISAGREEABLE OBJECT
1931
Wood, 19″ long.
Collection Mr. and Mrs. James Johnson Sweeney
(courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art)



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slow, deliberately regular curve, bulky parabolic forms, exaggeratedly luxurious or obsessive surfaces and patterns, all presented within a framework of simplicity and even austerity eminently suitable to the static nature of the "frozen" arts.

Figurative art is at a great disadvantage in the erotic arena when TV commercials, lascivious girdle ads, Hollywood movies, girlie and nudist and fetish magazines are available to any American with a couple of dollars in his pocket. Life has literally outstripped art. The camera and the film rendered invalid a majority of figurative painting, and eroticism was as strongly affected as any subject. It is notable that a good deal of the supposed erotic painting seen in galleries and studios today imitates photographic techniques. For this kind of erotica, detail and particularity of description are of the utmost importance. But it is only effective if executed in absolute imitation of photography, or else in some degree of abstraction. For pictorial reality, the camera is unbeatable, and when the camera is manipulated with esthetic skill and sensitivity, sensorial reality can be equally well served. The Nycata accepted a quite beautiful multiple print photograph of a girl masturbating by Arthur Bardo, though it was not hung at the opening, photography being considered a bit too graphic. Because of its high quality, and because of its unquestioned reality, this small black-and-white photograph was the most erotic (or read pornographic if you think serious art capable of pornography) single item in either one of the exhibitions. When photography imitates painting, on the other hand, it is usually negligible, as in the woozy "impressionistic" color photographs by Emil Cadoo which contributed to the confiscation of an issue of *Evergreen Review* two years ago. Speaking of which, parenthetically, the sensuous properties of color are largely neglected in erotic painting, though less so in sculpture. One of the few painters to use harsh, bold, vibrating color to great effect is Richard Lindner. His brutal amazons in leather jackets, cat-eyed sunglasses, purple gloves, their metallic flesh inviting, insatiable and perhaps impregnable, are greatly diluted when reproduced in black and white.

Charles Stark's paintings of great soft buttocks at the Nycata are an exception to the general belligerence and intentional sterility of representational erotica. Seen close-up and squeezed into the framing edges so that flesh is form and form flesh, they have a delicacy that is in definite contrast to Tom Wesselmann's hard, flat pink breasts treated in something of the same formal manner. The Stark is personalized and approving where the Wesselmann is cooly anti-sensuous, typical of a certain perversity that exists in both erotic abstraction and figuration. This aspect of current art has been called the "esthetics of nastiness" and has some of its most radical exponents among the west coast assemblagists and the masters of "funk." Dissonant color, tasteless garish patterns, wild combinations of visceral form and tactile effects, more chaotically employed than similar devices in pop art, are

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among the more "offensive" characteristics. Some of the cooler styles run dangerously close to the insistent neglect, or castration, of form as a life-giving force that epitomizes Art Nouveau. The *fin-de-siècle* artists used pattern to suppress, break up, and systematize, as do many of the contemporaries, but they also suppressed physicality—an element paramount today. Despite its ornamental attractiveness and superficial sensuality, art nouveau has in it a suggestion of death-like chill, a morbid confrontation of lust and death that can be found to a greater or lesser degree in much Surrealist poetry and painting, in Nora Jaffe's dark and fluid tunnel-forms, Lucas Samaras' elegant pin and needle fetishes—beautiful and deadly, Yayoi Kusama's phallus-studded chairs in which endless repetition commands the obsessive attention that is an integral part of eroticism, Eva Hesse's static gray to black frameworks, Lindsey Decker's putrescent plastic extrusions. Nevertheless, the opposition and eventual union of Eros and Thanatos is one more contradiction to be absorbed in abstraction. Metamorphosis is still the subject. Although quite different in effect, the dry and un-nuanced eroticism of art nouveau may be the product of motivations analogous to the firm-fleshed calm of the Indian sculptures, the slowed sensuality of Oldenburg's objects and the work of the abstract "eccentrics"—which are robust, not sterile. An eroticism cleansed of violence is not unsuitable to the pacifist orientation of younger artists today; by the same token it is difficult to assert a sunny, altogether life-affirming art in time of war.

Yet such perversity is also manifested humorously (now and then even wittily); there is pink popular humor, the black humor of sick jokes and sight gags, or Rabelaisian blue humor. A sophisticated or jaded audience is likely to find all erotic realism humorous rather than arousing, but Henry Miller's mood of ludicrous celebration, the euphoric spirit of the Indian "Great Delight," real ribaldry, or the idealistic tenderness of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* were absent from the Janis and Nycata shows, although a combination of pink, black, and blue wit in deceptively mild guise could be seen in Jack Wesley's show at Robert Elkon this winter. Given the anti-sexuality of some so-called erotic art that is erotic in subject alone, one might ask where the line is drawn between "cool" and "cold," whether the two arise from the same or an altogether different approach. The decisive factor is, finally, the sensuous element. The distinction between pornography and eroticism no longer seems valid and can, in turn, only be judged in the context of the individual. The question is now merely a legal one, of interest to the general public only in view of civil rights and the hope of a more naturally oriented society. It is, for instance, doubtful whether an obscenity case could be made against an abstraction. Yet where pornography is generally defined as art intended to stimulate active sexual response and lacking any esthetically redeeming factors, the matter of personal taste on the erotic as well as the esthetic level immediately enters in. A painter whose work is often

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called erotic insists that it takes intelligence to be erotic, intelligence and refinement which are lacking in the pornographic. (I would add that it is the intelligence to refine the instinctual rather than to destroy it.) On a more superficial level, what is titillating or offensive to a sixty-year-old Iowan may be unexciting to a thirty-year-old New Yorker, and personal taste in any case resists analysis.

I'm hardly recommending it, but there is no reason why abstraction should not be as subject to obscenity bans as any other style. Its oblique reference to the physical, sensuous, or symbolic is likely to have an erogenous effect on some viewers, sometimes, and that is, after all, the most that can be said of any erotic art in any context. The most blatant pornography arouses only a percentage of its viewers to action. Suppressed as the psychological and anthropomorphic elements may be in much recent art, the implicit power of such references is not imaginary, and it outdistances explicit references which time has exhausted esthetically. It seems important that the field of erotica no longer be limited to depiction of a narrowly limited sexual subject matter. What is needed is not new definitions but greater flexibility of visual response, and an art production that admits the personal and ultimately abstract quality of the erotic experience. As long as it is necessary to hold "erotic art shows" which businessmen line up to see, and to talk about a "Trend," everyone concerned is bound to be disappointed. A situation in which erotic stimuli could be perceived in a broad range of subjects and styles as a matter of fact and taste, in which such exhibitions were not publicised, but could be taken for granted like other art exhibitions, would be infinitely preferable to the present situation, in which voyeurism is the major concern and the spectators are unsatisfied because they seek specifically sexual rather than sensuous and sensual stimuli.

ANTHONY BURGESS

London Letter

I CHRISTMASSED IN THE COUNTRY and did a lot of rather bizarre bread-and-butter literary work (God, how like *Fors Clavigera* this sounds already, except that Ruskin never had to do bread-and-butter literary work). I mean: fifteen thousand words on the Grand Tour; a popular essay on precognition; a study of the American Jew as Voice of the Nation; a little piece on Mark Twain and *Finnegans Wake* (Ph.D. thesis material there, lads); a short story about talking

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blood; articles on Malcolm Lowry, the Pre-Raphaelites, and the Modern View of Milton; other things I've forgotten. My novel, which has at least passed the point of no return, got six new sheets added to it. It should have been finished months ago, and if it is not finished soon I had better abandon it altogether. If one spends too long on a shortish novel the end bears little relation to the beginning.

We came back to London—wife and I, Border collie, two cats—on St. Bridget's Day and went to get moderately stoned in, appropriately, an Irish pub. So on the feast of the Purification, which is sometimes called Candlemas and is also the birthday of James Joyce, James Stephens and the Shakespeare twins, as well as being Groundhog Day, we were able to pour ourselves back into London life very crapulous and subdued. The literary quarrels were already well under way, though these are more and more being conducted in extra-literary arenas. One lot of authors wrote to *The Times* expressing unequivocal support for the American campaign in Vietnam; another lot said that the war had better stop. There have been odd sneers over authors' telephones. Limericks have been composed, like "The people who read Brigid Brophy/ Should contend for the Krafft-Ebing Trophy" (something like that, anyway) and "There's no need to ask what my name is;/ You can tell from my smell that I'm Amis" and "Mr. Anthony Impotent Burgess/ Pretends he's controlling his urges" and so on. At the end of last year some authors obtained grants from the Arts Council, and there was quite a row about the principle of selection. In the New Year honours list, Muriel Spark was elevated to the Order of the British Empire, to which Mary Quant, mother of the mini-skirt, already belonged. The man who coached the England eleven to victory in last year's international football contest was dubbed knight. Nothing new came the way of the Beatles. The Beatles have grown moustaches. I don't know why I'm telling you all this.

We're not dull in London, despite all they tell you: there's always something going on. Mr. Kosygin, the Soviet Prime Minister, came to visit us just before Shrove Tuesday. Harold Wilson, the British Prime Minister, gave a long speech of welcome at the airport, addressing Mr. Kosygin as "old friend" or, in a respectable *Clockwork Orange* accent, *starry droog*. How frequently, for the benefit of our foreign visitors, London behaves in fact just as it does in fiction. Despite the many American film-versions of *Dr. Jekyll and Mr. Hyde,* we don't see all that much fog. But fog suddenly descended for Mr. Kosygin's benefit, and his aircraft had to be diverted from Gatwick to Heathrow. Undoubtedly hot toasted muffins will be served at Claridge's, bobbies will say "Werry cold, ain't it, sir?" and children will be lashed to labour in the mines. Mr. Kosygin will go back (by the time you read this he will, whether assassinated or not, have gone back) convinced that Charles Dickens knew his 1967 London. Mr. Direck, the Boston-

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ian in H. G. Wells's *Mr. Britling Sees it Through,* was relieved to find London quaintly Washington Irvingesque: he had feared that "it would be just another thundering New York . . ." (the dots are Wells's, not mine). He need not have feared, nor need any American visitor. It will be slow and uniced and worm-eaten; only when the visitor has returned will it become another thundering New York. Literature, thank God, is greater than life.

To return to Mr. Kosygin. British working-men, Tory in pubs, Labour when they vote, have an affection for Russian visitors which has absolutely nothing to do with ideology. They have cheered Mr. Kosygin, whom they call "cosy gin," far more than they would ever cheer the Queen. There seems to be an element of class-solidarity here which requires no Marxist interpretation. Mr. Kosygin, who has brought no dinner-jacket with him, looks, and even dresses, like a working-man who has made good. He speaks what might well be an obscure working-class dialect of English (like that of Newcastle-on-Tyne, say), none of your plummy jaw-dropping royal family public school (Americans read "private") language of authority and intimidation. All Russians can drink deep, and this goes down well too. And, as we have Karl Marx buried in Highgate Cemetery, and we know that the USSR was really forged in the British Museum, we can't help feeling paternal towards our great Soviet visitors. We even tend to turn Russia into a kind of annexe of London, since Russia starts with Russian ships at Tilbury, and when we get to Leningrad it looks (except for the Byzantine eccentricities) very much like an overblown and run-down suburb of Greater London. In Leningrad you will see British working-men walking through the summer streets with their braces showing (Americans read "suspenders"), saying things like: "I've been length and breadth of Nevsky Prospekt lookin' for fish and chips and I couldn't get the buggers anywhere." The British proletariat gets on all right with the Russians, though not when it comes to ideology. It's all a matter of solidarity through out-of-date bourgeois furnishings, striped blue suits, brawling over drink, not caring much about collars and ties and protocol.

It was thought once that, with the spread of affluence, the British working-man would become bourgeois. This does not seem to be happening. Wall-to-wall carpeting, automobiles, telesnacks and tinned ravioli are features of contemporary working-class life, but there has been, as yet, little submission to the profounder properties of middle-class culture—the "educated" accent, a liking for the theatre, the deliberate cultivation of racial tolerance. The most popular programme on British television is, at this moment of writing, a weekly series which deals with life in the drab Poplar area of east London. It is a programme which violently proclaims the vitality of the working-class *koine* and makes no bones about those insular prejudices which are deeply ingrained in the British proletariat. There

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are four characters—a middle-aged worker called Alf, the nature of whose work is—with a reticence suggesting Henry James—unspecified; his wife, who asks questions like "Is the Veetnam Ease like a Chink, then?"; their mini-skirted daughter Rita, whose name is apocapised to Reet; their Liverpool son-in-law, who rejoices in drawing the dole, fiddling the National Assistance, chatting up birds, and eating chip butties (sandwiches of fried potatoes).

Alf is, though a working-man, violently Tory and ludicrously patriotic. Inveighing at his absent wife when the fire won't draw, he looks up at a portrait of the Queen and says: "I didn't mean you, yer majesty." His xenophobia is as thorough as a senna pod bowel movement. The French are expert at knocking-shops and vino, but nothing else. "Your German," says Alf, "is scared stiff of the cold steel." Indians and Pakistanis and Negroes are all termed indifferently "sambos" and "nignogs." Despication of foreigners is a motif of the Poplar décor. In the local telephone kiosk someone has pencilled "The Pope is the head of the Mafia." At the local labour exchange Irish immigrant workers keep silent about their faith and provenance but, under their breath, denounce English pigs and Protestant pigs. England itself is full of layabouts, many of them black, brown, turbaned, or rosaried, and these bless Harold Wilson ("your bloody Harold Wilson," as Alf calls him) and the Welfare State. Alf, hard-working, devoted to the memory of Churchill, home after overtime to find his wife at the movies and his dinner "incinderated," is a sort of broken Coriolanus, a reviled or mocked misfit, a coarse and cursing bald and bespectacled parody of a shabby British lion. We, the audience, are expected to take the Wilsonic, layabout, foreigner-welcoming, progressive, mini-skirted, pop-loving, chip-butty-eating side, joining his family in sneering at him. At least, that is the side taken by the author himself and by the actor who plays Alf. The declared side, anyway.

In practice, most viewers secretly believe that Alf is right. He is a mouthpiece for prejudices as powerful in the working-class as ever they were, though it is now recognised that such prejudices are ignoble. Moreover, they can be dangerous, since it is against the law to express even minimal antipathy towards a black or coloured skin. It is, of course, stupid to attempt to legislate for an island people's natural response to foreigners: the British have always been insular and xenophobic and always will be. So long as xenophobia doesn't express itself in race-riots or discrimination over jobs and housing, we don't have to worry overmuch. We've had no race-riots since the shameful affair at Notting Hill in the nineteen-fifties. If some Negro students can't get apartments, neither can white couples with children. The unemployment (called re-deployment) which is one of the tools of expansion and deflation doesn't noticeably affect the coloured more than the white population. On the whole, things

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could be a good deal worse for coloured immigrants, and they could hardly be better for Irish ones.

So the tele-execrations of wogs and nignogs are a harmless expression of a melanophobia that rarely seeks action. And Alf's "It's all the fault of your bloody Pope, ennit?" gets its quota of laughs from Catholics. Verbal releases are a fine thing. If I call my Border collie a black bastard, which I do frequently to a response of tail-wags, I am using a purely decorative adjective. Give me a white dog, and I'll gladly call him a white bastard. My grey cat has just come into the room, mewing loudly, and I have called him a loud-mouthed grey sod. That has quietened him down. I think our coloured immigrants have reached a phase of confidence which would not be offended by insulting references to their ethnic differentiators. But this is not allowed. So we have to get a man on television to do it for us, and we pretend to be outraged. We are, of course, still the hypocritical British.

It's significant, I suppose, that the race-theme has disappeared almost entirely from contemporary British literature. A novel like Bernard Malamud's *The Fixer* hits us with a profound shock: we are made to realise that pogroms—no matter how remote in time and space—still fester with some Jewish writers. We don't have fire-next-time stuff from our Negro novelists either. The inflammatory materials of our communicative media are supra-racial—the birth-control pill, the housing shortage, abortion, the growth of drug addiction, the wage-freeze. Television makes a better job of dramatising such issues than does serious literature; serious literature regards them as ephemeral and so is left with rather old-hat subject-matter (the agonies of marriage or growing up in the provinces or the failure of the generations to attain a dialogue with each other). The books that achieve a major impact continue to come from America—*In Cold Blood* and *The Valley of the Dolls* and *The Fixer* and young Mr. Barth's heavyweight allegory. Contemporary Britain has no stunning literary themes.

We have produced as many big drunken writers as any country, and we return to these for shocks which we refuse to see as essentially extra-literary. Another attempt is being made to make the British public find greatness in Malcolm Lowry, and this has to be done through the glamour of his alcoholism and his sudden untimely death. A popular newspaper blows on the still warm coals of Dylan Thomas' scandalous life, seeking out his widow Caitlin and reporting her as saying: "I've forgotten about him a long time ago. I hate anything to do with his past life . . . I can't even decide now if I liked the bloody man—all his betrayals and weaknesses. He was a lot more cunning and clever than I was, you know. I was just a kind of mother-figure to him." Her luxurious flat overlooking the Tiber has no books by Dylan on its shelves. To complete the triumvirate,

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Brendan Behan got full coverage last autumn in a book about his spectacular dipsomania. The cult of the scandalous writer serves, in effect, as a substitute for a concern with literature itself. But so little of our literature demands concern. This is perhaps because Britain is no longer an arena of world-shattering issues. There's very little to get angry about really.

But the young remain disaffected, don't they? True, but they follow their Californian mentors—switching on, tuning in, dropping out. A fortnightly newspaper called *The International Times*—*It* for short—seems very little different from *The Village Voice* or *The Village Other*: Burroughs and Ginsberg are adulated; we get articles on the "auto-destructive" techniques of a pop-group called "The Who" (systematic savaging of expensive guitars); the times and venues of freak-outs are advertised. What worries me chiefly about this revolutionary journalism is the tiredness of its prose, the imperfect assimilation of its Zen and psychedelic (shouldn't that be "psychodelic"?) terminology, its half-baked and very juvenile shock-devices.

The big literary sensation of the year will, inevitably, centre around an American book, one that has long been absorbed into the American current but is here still a subject for scandal. I mean *Last Exit to Brooklyn*. Taking advantage of a law which enables private citizens to bring charges of obscenity against books, a couple of British members of parliament succeeded last year in getting three copies of *Last Exit* destroyed on the order of a magistrate. Encouraged by this, the Director of Public Prosecutions has now served a writ on the publishers, and we shall be having a full-dress trial by jury at the Old Bailey. Whether the publishers win or lose, the cost of their defence will almost certainly drive them into liquidation. I appeared as a defence witness in the minor trial, and I shall do so again in the major one. I expect insults and charges of personal depravity, on a rather more spectacular scale than the ones I've already endured. In a review of *Last Exit*, I suggested that "no book could well be less obscene." A prosecution witness wittily put forward *Pride and Prejudice* for my consideration in this respect. I submitted that it might corrupt the impressionable more, since all the Bennet sisters (with the possible exception of Mary) are very attractive, which is more than can be said for any of the characters in *Last Exit*. But nobody wishes to argue the matter out, and one may predict confidently that the Old Bailey will resound with highly charged shibboleths as a substitute for reason. We should have got over all this with the *Lady Chatterley* trial, but we're evidently gluttons for punishment. It's a pity that the money the State will expend on the trial can't be used for buying a few kidney machines for our hospitals (there was recently a ballot to decide whose lives should be saved by those we have and who should, literally, be condemned to death for lack of them). But our souls, and the law's lumbering engines for cleansing them, must obviously come first.

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JOHN SIMON

Theatre Chronicle

No Broadway season would be complete without two or three hits imported more or less intact from England; we already have *The Killing of Sister George,* and now Harold Pinter's *The Homecoming* can be added to the roster. Rather like last season's *Marat/Sade, The Homecoming* is only an essentially nonsensical pretext for an expert, marvelously disturbing production, and that, in our exiguous uptown theater is considered enough: in the country of the bland, the cockeyed is king. The non-plot is simple: into an unwholesomely stagnant, often seething and sometimes erupting, family circle—consisting of a rowdy old butcher father, a nastily superior pimp of an elder son, a slow-witted tough of a younger son, and a desiccated chauffeur of an uncle—the eldest son returns from America for a visit. He has become a professor of philosophy there and brings with him an English wife of some years' standing, whom the family has not yet met. And the professor watches imperturbably as the mother of his children gets drawn into an unholy involvement with the family, decides to work as a prostitute for the pimp and also satisfy all the men at home, except the wizened uncle who may have dropped dead at play's end. The professor coolly returns to America.

The Homecoming, wildly praised here by critics as different as Harold Clurman and Richard Gilman (though they are alike in referring to the play as "masterful" where they mean "masterly") raises once again the Pinter problem. An actor named Harold Pinter writes a parody of an absurdist play for a contest in an English publication; the entry wins the prize and its author, intoxicated by his success, proclaims it a serious contribution to the theatre of the absurd. What would constitute a perfect absurdist farce, becomes reality forthwith. Cheered on by the critics, our histrion proceeds to write one pretentious pastiche after another, whereupon it is the critics' and the audiences' turn to compete in a contest of who can read more meaning into portentous vacuity.

This is not to say that I consider Pinter wholly without talent: in his less ambitious pieces, such as *The Collection* or *The Lover,* he is able to create moods of smiling sinisterness, casual evil, in which we never know whether the impending explosion will release laughter or violence. But the longer the play, the harder it is to keep the ambiguities in the air, to charge minutiae with enough electricity to last the full course, to sidestep incipient communication. In plays like *The Caretaker, The Birthday Party,* and now, *The Homecoming,* desperate stratagems are required to keep the scales from tipping over into total meaninglessness or, worse yet, inchoate meaning. One of the main tricks here is self-contradiction: a dead wife is referred to now

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as a whore, now as a fine woman—and a living wife behaves now as one, now as the other; a dead man may have been a true friend or a treacherous wife-stealer; a repulsive, lowbrow pimp suddenly broaches lofty philosophical problems in sesquipedalian language while a philosopher seems incapable of elementary speculation; a rapist proves woman-shy; a family tyrant is reduced to puerile pleading; a husband who seems to care for his wife is willing to let her become an incestuous prostitute; and so on in unabating progression, turnabout after turnabout, paradox on paradox. The other chief trick is to take a basically harmless or even meaningless detail, e.g., will someone drink a glass of water or not, and by surrounding it with childishly simple dialogue that is yet pregnant with dread hints ("If you take the glass . . . I'll take you.—How about me taking the glass without you taking me?—Why don't I just take you?") imply all sorts of profound things about the evil lurking in banality and the banality of evil.

The sedulously advanced Richard Gilman wastes no time in hailing *The Homecoming* for not dealing with "character or psychology" but with "*kinds* of speech and therefore archetypes of being" (an enthymeme to end all enthymemes), having an "immobile, non-anecdotal, ritualistic vision" and a "mythic condition." Well, there you have all the fashionable critical status symbols in a nutshell: transcendence of personality, archetypes, ritual, myth. Just as symbolist poetry from Mallarmé to Stevens concerned itself with word structures and the process of writing poetry, so now the drama is supposed to be immobile, concerned with kinds of speech, language "can *be* the play"—and we get "a drama of the mind, which is not to say an intellectual drama." (Perhaps the term Gilman is searching for is "pseudointellectual drama.") It is all right for a poem to be about words, poetry, the making of the poem, because the principal ingredients of a poem are, precisely, words and sounds. But the chief ingredients of a play are the players and their exchange of statements, their actions and relationships. The kind of play Gilman advocates could best be played by radios, phonographs, projections and computers, and that way lies madness, or, as it is now called, happenings.

Harold Clurman, on the other hand, is grand about Pinter in a more old-fashioned way. "Those who do not respect and appreciate his talent understand little of our times or its [sic] theatre." I should think that those who can understand our time, which is an incomprehensible mess, and its theatre, which has sunk to depths beyond fathoming, are charlatans or fools, whose respect and admiration Pinter can certainly count on, the question being merely whether he wants it.

But the production by the Royal Shakespeare Company is another matter. All the actors—and especially Ian Holm, Paul Rogers, and Vivien Merchant—display such range combined with such control, can make the most outrageous devices (Holm's falsetto) so natural, the most subliminal ones (Miss Merchant's near-catatonia) so forceful,

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that even inert or inept material rises to its feet and begins to dance a wonderfully knowing ballet. And the choreographer is not the playwright, but the director, Peter Hall, who finds tempos and groupings and trajectories that are so good that the play is forced into breathing, speaking, moving, corpse though it is. And a final accolade for John Bury's design: nothing but greys and browns into which people wear further greys and browns, pitifully sparse and anachronistic furniture, and a giant, lunatic staircase, ascending and ascending—into infinity or nausea or nowhere.

The Open Theater, a kind of successor to The Living Theater, having the same sort of commitment to politics, to experimentation, to ensemble work within which the actor is encouraged to become a creator, has come to off-Broadway (from off-off-Broadway) with two productions: one deserved hit and one equally deserved failure. *America Hurrah* by Jean-Claude van Itallie is a sassy bit of cabaret skilfully staged and acted: it has a nice satirical point of view that is not afraid of rising into tragicomic despair or sprawling into child's play, into almost pure childish nastiness. I can call it very many good things, save only a play. It is three skits, the first of which subdivides into further skitlets; the second of which is a little long, short as it is; and the third of which is perfect, except that it is one vast gimmick: a splendid gimmick, but a gimmick.

The first episode of the first playlet, *Interview,* is typical: four very different types of job applicants are confronted by four very similar half-masked interviewers who engage them in a hideous secular catechism. The questions themselves become more and more the answers, as the would-be answers are more and more nipped in the bud. The applicants leave utterly crushed by the questioners half-smirking through their half-masks. And so it goes through a series of stylized episodes belaboring psychiatrists and priests, auto accidents and politicians, cocktail parties and telephone operators. It is as though everyone everywhere had got the wrong number, and the world divided itself chiefly into those distressed by this, and those who batten on it. Van Itallie and the production manage transitions smoothly, and the impact of each scene, whether of the lightning or snowballing variety, is handsomely communicated. But one cannot help feeling that one is watching not a play but a living newspaper, albeit a nicely sarcastic one.

The second item, *TV,* seems less fragmented, even though it, too, is made up of bits and pieces: three employees, two male and one female, of a network rating service watch, or, rather, don't watch a series of programs unfold and enfold them. The employees tease one another, eat, choke on chicken bones, get involved in a triangle situation, quarrel, etc., while actors representing TV creatures enact every kind of video fare, from religious services to old war movies, from musical to "family-type" programs, one more appalling than the next, and—this is van Itallie's best achievement—all grotesque and malo-

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dorous enough without smelling of exaggeration. Gradually the TV non-lives and the employees' pseudo-lives merge in a serio-comic dance of death-in-life, and, within its limits, the play in perfectly successful.

The last fifteen-minute item, *Motel,* is a compelling stage metaphor: into a modern, antiseptic yet cheesy motel room, in which the old frump of a proprietress holds forth in an unending monologue about the material advantages of the place, comes a young couple who never speak. All three figures are played by stupid-looking larger-than-life dummies encasing the performers. While the proprietress itemizes the comforts of the motel, including self-flushing toilets, the young couple strip, use the facilities, disport themselves sexually, scrawl obscene words and drawings all over the place, and finally tear it to pieces, dismantling everything from those sapient toilets to the proprietress-dummy, and leave through the auditorium. While this funnily horrible scene is enacted, the cathartic effect is powerful. But once the *mauvais quart d'heure* is over, what does the nightmare mean? That materialism will be destroyed by its own built-in counterforce, vandalism? Perhaps, but I wish Mr. van Itallie would not be quite so cheerful about it, almost smug. I get the impression that he is enjoying it all too much; the whole play becomes a kind of *graffito,* a bright schoolboy prank. And here, even more than in the other two playlets, language is reduced to mere jibbering.

The acting company of eight is proficient—Cynthia Harris is the weakest link, Brenda Smiley the strongest; and both directors, Jacques Levy and Joseph Chaikin, have contributed cogent staging. The design is highly competent, with whoever made those oafish dolls (the program is on the laconic side) deserving special credit. In fact, *America Hurrah,* besides auguring well for Jean-Claude van Itallie, would also promise much for The Open Theater, if it had only not been for the abject flop of *Viet Rock.* This was really a series of loosely connected skits that took a group of American boys from their first Army physical through various phases of Vietnam drill, fighting, and dry rot; interspersed were incidents from the home front, such as a Congressional investigation of the war on TV, and the servicemen's women waiting, or not waiting. The point of view was simplistically anti-war, and that was all. Now I am not saying that the playwright is obliged to be fair and present both sides of an issue—though that method has worked handily for dramatists since Aeschylus. Nor do I insist that he or, in this case, she must treat a desperately serious issue otherwise than blatantly, with gobs of sound and fury. But here a problem does emerge.

Viet Rock is meant to be an absurdist play with bits of Brecht and Artaud for leavening. But the theatre of the absurd, though it has by now become a venerable institution imitated in watered-down form by every other hack, is not everybody's dish. Megan Terry lacks the creative originality, or, at the very least, inspired madness that the form demands; for a commercial anti-war play of the old-fashioned

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sort she might even have sufficient talent. We were given, for example, three young women striking matches in unison and setting fire to themselves as a chorus line, and as if they were simply lighting cigarettes. But what exactly does that make mock of? Again, the Virgin Mary, interviewed on television about her opinions on the war, just smiles, rocks her baby, and makes shruggingly noncommittal gestures. What is that supposed to satirize: God? the church? motherhood? Little of this pseudo-absurdist material was funny; but, worse yet, some of it tried to be moving, producing moments I can describe only as gallows humorlessness. Seven actors and six actresses declaimed, yelled, made various animal noises, sang, marched, careened about occasionally landing in the laps of front-row spectators, and, above all, spent a good deal of their time prone or supine on the floor. Miss Terry, who directed her play (much of which was improvised by the actors), confined a quarter of the action to the floor boards, perhaps on the overoptimistic assumption that once you hit the floor you cannot sink any farther. Marianne de Pury's music was, like Miss Terry's lyrics, a melodic misalliance between Brecht-Weill epic theatre and Bob Dylan—a kind of folk-epic rock.

In all of these plays, I repeat, words have a way of being self-effacing, often merely improvised; of becoming regressive, indeed vestigial. It is characteristic that in the *Times* article already referred to, Richard Gilman, to illustrate the dramatic superiority of Pinter's language, picked a speech from *The Homecoming* that is all flatness, greyness, amorphousness. What a relief, therefore, to hear verbal wit—along with other kinds—come into its own again in *At the Drop of Another Hat*. An English novelist friend of mine described Michael Flanders and Donald Swann as charming amateurs who recreate your living-room jocularity without pretending to be professional. I must admit that I would love to have such wit in *my* living room, but I don't, and this is not entirely due to the fact that I do not have a living room. The truth is that these two urbane and zestful artists are professional down to their finger tips, which applies equally to Swann, who actually directs them to a piano keyboard, as to Flanders, who having lost the use of his legs, can do wonders with a toss of the hand. I concede that their songs tend to run a bit thin (though with splendid exceptions); their wit seldom carrying as far or chopping as fine as it might. But there is Flanders's patter, ceaseless comic devastation, nonchalantly slicing to the quick. And to it, Swann's manic or bemused face, self-depreciatory or fiendish laughter, supply a worthy accompaniment. Here the wit is equal to anything we have heard from one fringe to the other, and beyond. Only it is delivered with such an artful pseudo-amateurishness as to be disarming as well as disemboweling.

My program is covered with enchanting and exhilarating sallies about our mores, beliefs, politics, and other everyday inanities, but, on mature reflection, I shall resist the urge to quote. There is hardly a remark here that does not evolve from another and reach out to the

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next, the humor growing organically before our eyes and ears. The jokes and *weltanschauung* are, like Flanders's expressions, the products as much of civilized weariness as of some delectably childlike faith in the power of sauciness, in the moral beauty of a stylishly tossed off barb. The pair are particularly hard on the English, which is a good thing, because the English are so exquisite at self-castigation, which, I believe, is the platonic form of the *vice anglais.* On second thought, I'll give you one sample. Flanders remarks with astonishment that we close our bars on Election Day; in England "we leave all the bars and pubs open—we feel nobody's going to vote for them sober." But already I regret not being able to convey the ominously dark coloration that Flanders can impart to the word "sober"—in much the same way Poe's raven must have intoned his "Nevermore."

The Lincoln Center Repertory Company, in an attempt at face lifting, if not, indeed, face saving, imported a director from Canada for its second production of the season, *Yerma.* The acting company had been augmented before, and several new faces appeared for the first time, including those of the two principals. A new set designer was brought in as well. The result was a better production than had previously been seen at the Vivian Beaumont Theatre, and if that should sound like faint praise, it is meant to.

Lorca, to begin with, was more of a poet than a playwright, and it was not till *Bernarda Alba* that his dramaturgy caught up with his poetry. Moreover, he is, like most true poets, essentially untranslatable, and though W. S. Merwin's rendering is considerably better than previous attempts to English him, it still cannot convey the resonance and implications in which the Spanish abounds. I suppose it has something to do with the style of folk poetry and proverbs whose suggestiveness Lorca's language annexes, whereas the English falls outside any available tradition, except possibly that of verse drama in our provincial little theatres, and that is more like falling into a trap. John Hirsch, the director, has staged the externals of the play handsomely, but, perhaps because he grew up in Hungary, he was not sensitive enough to what the actors were doing with, or rather *to,* the poetry. Here shadings were desperately needed but not forthcoming.

Once again, speech proved one of the main stumbling stones of this company: absolutely no one was up to the vocal requirements. This was particularly true of Gloria Foster as Yerma (a name that was, typically, pronounced half the time in the Spanish way, and half the time in the English). That Miss Foster is a Negro took its toll in two ways: most of the time she spoke an artificial stage English; at other times, under emotional stress, she would lapse into that vernacular for which her usual speech is the scarcely more felicitous corrective. Even in other ways, her interpretation, though bursting with energy, seemed inadequate: somehow, Miss Foster failed to communicate the intrinsically female nature of her urge—there was, in fact, something more sociologically than physiologically oriented in her basic quality.

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As her husband, Frank Langella, a generally interesting and sometimes excellent actor, did not find any motivation for, or conviction in, the character's negativity. His somewhat passive surliness did not provide Juan with either credibility or dramatic interest; since Lorca is here deliberately obfuscatory, it is up to the actor and director to provide some interpretation. Tom Rosqui should have made that shadow of "the other man," Victor, more laden with the pathos of the unspoken and unfulfilled; his scenes with Yerma, with their terrifying repression of a mutual yearning, became, through both performers' and the director's fault, unmoving. Aline MacMahon was, yet again, lacking in sense of locale, and Maria Tucci contributed one of her customary shallow performances.

Though Stanley Silverman's music was, as on previous occasions, poor stuff, Jean Erdman's dances and David Hays's sets and lighting were satisfactory. The costumes by James Hart Stearns were uninspired, but Hirsch's direction, in the crowd scenes at any rate, had vitality and visual excitement enough to make up for such lacks. Some of the lesser roles, too, were quite adequately handled. On the whole, this short and, as performed here, intermissionless play went by without eliciting any of the acute discomfort of former Lincoln Center productions.

Another repertory company, the APA, did no better with their one new production so far, *The Wild Duck;* in fact, despite the excessive praise this company always gets, it did rather worse. *The Wild Duck* may well be, underneath its seeming simplicity, one of the most demanding plays in the modern repertory. Comedy and tragedy, realism and symbolism are so subtly blended here that nothing is easier than for the actors to make missteps. The APA production, directed by Stephen Porter, manages to lose its way entirely. The first act almost works, with Richard Woods an acceptable Werle, and Clayton Corzatte, as Gregers, keeping his tones of a prissy trumpeter swan within some control. But by act two, Corzatte's voice turns into the triumph of the adenoids, and his Gregers becomes broader and broader and more grossly pathological. Donald Moffat's Ekdal, patently lacking charm, rapidly lapses into the laughable; it is hard to see what makes Hedvig adore him so, and harder yet what would make anyone, however myopic, expect to make an idealist out of him. As for Betty Miller's Gina, she is the high-school girl's notion of how to act a tough, uncultivated middle-aged woman, and what comes out is a kind of halfwitted fairy den mother, all gruffness and fussing.

The remaining performers are fair, except for Sidney Walker, a truly endearing, perhaps too endearing, Lieutenant Ekdal. But they all veer more and more toward farce, the pacing relaxes, and when the tragedy comes, it rings false and has to be embarrassedly glossed over. Here it is unfortunate that Jennifer Harmon's Hedvig is only sweet and wistful—not much sense of the precocity and poetry in the character—and that Joseph Bird's Relling is the kind, elderly

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frontier doctor of the Warner Brothers westerns rather than the voice of reason issuing from a still fairly young but dissipated body. The looks of the production are pedestrian, and Gilbert V. Hemsley, Jr.'s lighting even ignores the highly evocative directions Ibsen has provided. On opening night, the final curtain was slow coming down, and Bird felt obliged to ad lib; after "The hell you say!" which is the last line, he added "I wish I could believe that." It was an anticlimax, but it did sum up my feelings about this *Wild Duck,* which, regrettably, laid an egg.

Two typical comedies moved in on Broadway. One of these, Neil Simon's *The Star-Spangled Girl* is the lowest form of theatrical humor, in which neither plot nor character is allowed to obtrude on the concatenation of gags that is supposed to flow undisturbed from 8:30 to 11. George Axelrod has staged it all as if the cast of three had a commuter train to catch. Of these three, Anthony Perkins and Richard Benjamin are less than winning, but Connie Stevens is a positive loser. Woody Allen's *Don't Drink the Water* is somewhat better. Here the characters are recognizable types at least, and do make some psychological sense. Furthermore, everybody is not fundamentally lovable, and the hero, a mercenary, cantankerous, despotic Jewish caterer, has, for those who can perceive it, a good and bestial streak in him. Though most of the jokes are no more trenchant than Simon's, Allen occasionally comes up with something as fetchingly elemental as "You're crazy! Do you know you're crazy? Years of insanity have made you crazy." Lou Jacobi is a superb petty tyrant who can make pettiness seem grand and tyranny the essence of sweet reason; Kay Medford is funny as always, Anthony Roberts and Dick Libertini are engaging, and only Anita Gilette, in miniskirts, painfully reveals thick legs and thin talent.

That brings us to that beloved American institution, the musical comedy. Let us start with the one that purports to be most daring, *Cabaret.* Christopher Isherwood's *Berlin Stories* was a somewhat toned-down version of the truth: the author was unwilling to be candid about the narrator; however revealing he was about everyone else, this left the center of the narrative hollow. When John van Druten turned the work into a play, *I Am a Camera,* sentimentalization set in, as it did in the subsequent movie version. But all this was nothing compared to the rank edulcoration perpetrated by the musical treatment, *Cabaret.* Here, for example, a lovable aging Jewish shopkeeper is introduced out of nowhere, to epitomize all the sweetness that Jewish writers on Broadway have usually ascribed to idealized Jewish lay figures for the delectation of large Jewish audiences hungering for self-delusion. Here a typical petty bourgeois German landlady becomes so amiable that she just misses out on becoming an honorary Jew. Here the non-lovers of the original, the young British writer, Isherwood, who cannot love a woman, and the deluded little nymphomaniac, Sally Bowles, with her exquisite sense of unreality, turn into perfect Broadway lovers: she, sweet and essentially monoga-

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mous; he, likable, not overconcerned with the sissyish business of writing, and, best of all, an American; together, they partake of a near-perfect boy-meets-girl romance. Here the rise of Nazism is represented by a few effete chorus boys donning brown shirts and ineptly miming the beating up of some innocent people. Here the principal locale, the cabaret, meant to convey the degeneracy of Berlin in the thirties, does not manage to yield a single piece of wickedness that would make the most youthful catechumen blush.

Well, there is one suggestive moment. A line of denuded and bedaubed chorines dances out onto the stage, and gradually we become aware that one of them is a man. Aside from this, nothing. During previews, in the number in which the aforementioned man, a nasty little night-club M.C., dances with a gorilla-mistress, the punchline was that he loved the ape even though she was Jewish. By the time of the opening, this "shocking" bit was softened: the gorilla was merely a *"meeskite."* Now *"meeskite,"* as a previous and tasteless song informed us, is Yiddish for "ugliness"; in that song, the little Jewish shopkeeper instructed us that one can be infinitely lovable though a *"meeskite."* So, if you are good at equations, you could perhaps figure out that when the M.C. calls the gorilla a *"meeskite,"* what he really means is a. . . .

I think I am being downright munificent to the tunes and lyrics of John Kander and Fred Ebb if I call them undistinguished; at least they are less of a *"meeskite"* than Joe Masteroff's book. Lotte Lenya, a genius at bitchiness, is miscast in the basically likable part of the landlady; Jack Gilford does well by her little Jewish suitor, but he could by now play that part in his sleep, and seems at times determined to demonstrate it. Joel Grey is passable as the sleazy M.C., but instead of portraying an older, depraved man trying to look young and cute, he comes on as a schoolboy acting grown-up and wicked. Jill Haworth and Bert Convy, as the lovers, generate about as many sparks as a pair of chopsticks rubbing together during a Chinese meal, and Harold Prince's direction certainly does not ignite anyone or anything. Ronald Field's dances, however, have their bright moments, and both Boris Aronson's décor and Patricia Zipprodt's costumes suggest something of the required decadence. But much greater is the decadence of Broadway, which, wanting to have it both ways, takes material with some bite in it, pretends to serve it up unsweetened, and then gives the public the usual lollypop.

Less need be said of *Walking Happy,* an insipid and expendable musical based, again, on a flavorsome play, Harold Brighouse's *Hobson's Choice.* The one notable thing here is Danny Daniels's ingratiating choreography, which, unfortunately, starts with the *pièce de résistance* instead of building up to it. Another point of passing interest is the colossal caption running in the papers, "NORMAN WISDOM IS IRRESISTIBLE—Walter Kerr and everybody else." At the risk of disputing Walter Kerr, and the only slightly less weighty everybody else, I must declare that I find Norman Wisdom over-

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whelmingly resistible. This British vaudevillian carries the endearing underdog routine to new depths, becoming, as it were, an endearing worm, begging the audience to love, love, love humble little him. But, surely, it is not the worm that is supposed to do the angling.

Broadway, of course, is most comfortable, as in the case of *Hello, Dolly!* and *Mame,* when it can adapt for the musical stage something that was already trash on the non-musical one. So now we have *I Do! I Do!,* based on Jan de Hartog's *The Fourposter,* a two-character compendium of every platitude about marriage and parenthood from the wedding night to the aging parents' leaving the old house and bed to another pair of newlyweds. Tom Jones's book and lyrics are remarkable chiefly for their minimal grasp of English and maximal hold on clichés, the two often artfully combined: we hear of "sveltely dressed" women and "anthropoidal apes," and the pregnant heroine sings, "If I hold so still that my heart does not beat/He'll sometimes kick me gently with his feet," for the like of which Mr. Jones should be punched stoutly with the fists. Harvey Schmidt's music is no better than the text deserves. But, miraculously, at the end of act one, the show does briefly crawl out from under its submediocrity into surprisingly palpitating life. Much of the credit for this is due Gower Champion's consistently resourceful staging, to which not only the actors but also Oliver Smith's nimbly pirouetting pieces of scenery respond with alacrity. Robert Preston achieves a joyous mixture of charm and fatuity as he lends his ever graceful authority to the part of the husband; as the wife, Mary Martin adds yet another first chapter to The Mary Martin Story. A critic friend of mine observed that this eternal ingenue is so average that he wondered how they ever picked her out of the chorus line. The answer is simple: because she was so much more average than all the rest.

Off-Broadway, another old Rodgers and Hart musical, *By Jupiter,* was revived in a comparatively opulent production under the watchful eye of Rodgers himself. It is a show that some twenty-three years ago, with the irrepressible Ray Bolger and the beautiful Constance Moore, thoroughly entranced me; it was the first American musical I had seen, and I was quite young. The war of the Greeks on the Amazons, which would require a Giraudoux or, at least, an Anouilh to do it justice, is a cheerless affair here, its one lesbo-homosexual joke paraded about in endless infinitesimal permutations. Few of the performers are up to the kind of thaumaturgy that could bring the long-dead (not to say the stillborn) to life. But Sheila Sullivan and Rosemarie Heyer are attractive and talented girls, and should go far. Most disappointing are the orchestrations of Abba Bogin, which, by trying to be enormously clever and contemporary, manage to undo even such lovely songs as, for instance, "Careless Rhapsody"—the accompaniment overcoming the melody as completely and as sneakily as the Greeks the Amazons. This revival opened to mostly favorable notices, which shows that, in a hopelessly unstable world, Broadway's critical taste can be relied on to stay resolutely put a quarter century behind.

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HAYDEN CARRUTH

Materials from Life

MAN'S EFFORT TO CONCEPTUALIZE HIS LOVE must have begun nearly as soon as his first conscious recognition that lying together is warmer than lying apart—I am not facetious—and in the millennia since then it has generated thousands upon thousands of works, theoretical and imaginative, which most people agree are the finest products of the human mind and heart. In the face of this, it is difficult to decide that a new book, just received and just read, makes a significant addition to all that has gone before. It is doubly difficult when the work in question[1] lacks the flair for expression and the versatility of feeling which the subject has inspired in the great minds of the past—Plato, the Psalmist, Ovid, Plotinus, Augustine, Bernard: this is a formidable tradition. Too formidable; and although our minds inevitably do draw comparisons, surely their doing so betrays the unamiable side of our character. The fact is that Irving Singer, in his book called *The Nature of Love,* says what no one has said before, or at all events what no one has said explicitly or systematically. And if his writing is neither as graceful nor as powerful as one might wish, nor always perfectly lucid, it is still good enough; it has wit and verve; it is far better than what we normally find in professional philosophy. Above all, Singer writes with no ostentation of technical virtuosity, and his book will be understandable to any reader who has even a passing acquaintance with philosophical aims and methods. Certainly it is an important book, and certainly it is a very good book. It has the kind of goodness we associate with originality and modesty and a genuine desire to serve.

Of course one may be mistaken. Perhaps somewhere a book exists which duplicates Singer's accomplishment. The theoretical literature of love is immense, even the recent parts of it, and I have read no more than a little; I imagine no one has read it all. Theologians of every persuasion, including the pagan, have been especially productive in our time. Such books as Martin Buber's *I and Thou,* Etienne Gilson's study of Héloïse and Abelard, Simone Weil's *Waiting for God,* the essays and sermons of Paul Tillich, and even, in its implications of new human discoveries of love, Teilhard de Chardin's *The Phenomenon of Man*—these and many others are popular and doubtless have helped great numbers of people; although all such works, I think, including the last I have named, suffer from the necessary ultimate regressiveness of Christian thought. The secularists have been less pro-

[1] THE NATURE OF LOVE: PLATO TO LUTHER, by *Irving Singer.* Random House. $7.95.

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lific, if you do not count the quacks and semi-quacks—the sexologists —who have enjoyed such a field day with their manuals. Secular philosophers have been impeded and embarrassed by the great burden of Freudian apparatus which was handed to them years ago. Albert Camus, for instance, had an *attitude* toward love, which may be worked out in more or less detail from suggestions contained in *The Fall,* but I doubt that he had a *concept* of love. Most philosophers simply evade the issue. Jean-Paul Sartre, more serious and more rigorous, has given us his "theory of existential psychoanalysis"; but it is an awkward, difficult theory; and although few of us would care to reject his notion of the importance of choice as validating our theoretical human "authenticity," at the same time the famous "freedom" that goes with it remains elusive and obscure in the experience of our lives, particularly in the experience of falling in love.

Singer performs a more useful service. Where Sartre began his discussion of being with a consideration of man in alienation, Singer begins with man in love, and what he has produced is a phenomenology of love, having all the credibility and simplicity that Sartre's work lacks. (The sheer tenebrosity and poundage of Sartre's book on Jean Genet seems especially needless in the light of what Singer has done.) I do not mean, of course, that Singer has out-performed Sartre; his aim is both narrower and shorter. But within the limits of a discussion of man's affective experience, Singer, from a general philosophical orientation similar to Sartre's (so the reader deduces, although Singer himself does not say it), has moved in a direction both more fruitful and more easily verifiable than Sartre's.

The heart of Singer's conceptualization lies in his first twenty-five pages. He begins with the accepted notion that "love is a way of valuing something," either a thing or a person, although we agree generally to confine the discussion to love of persons. Singer then analyzes love-as-valuation into two functions. The first he calls appraisal, which in turn he divides into two types. "Objective" appraisal is the discovery in the beloved of values which are commonly and publicly agreed upon. It is objective, of course, only in the sense that it is publicly verifiable, since a change of taste may easily overturn it: the "objective value" of Gina Lollobrigida is appraised differently, at least in some respects, from the "objective value" of Jean Harlow. The second type of appraisal is what Singer calls individual appraisal, this being the private valuation made by the particular lover who finds in his particular beloved values corresponding to his needs: she is blonde and he dislikes brunettes, she is rich while he disapproves of poverty, etc. Both objective and individual appraisal, however, are merely the *discovery* of values which already exist in the beloved, and by themselves they do not, according to Singer, suffice for a description of love. What is needed is the addition of the other half of love-as-valuation, which Singer calls bestowal. Bestowal occurs when the lover assigns or ascribes to his beloved values which she does not necesarily possesss in

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actuality, but which in a sense she comes to possess as a consequence of her lover's act. Thus loving consists of three forms of valuation, of which two are incidental while the third is essential. The beloved may be good-looking, which is a commonly held value discovered through objective appraisal; she may speak Chinese, which is a value only in respect to her lover's particular needs and is discoverable only through individual appraisal; and she may suffer from a hideous speech defect, which her lover turns into a charming mannerism by bestowing upon it a value it does not possess in "reality." Through the act of bestowal, in other words, the lovers transcend considerations of mere desire, convenience, and need, which may be requisite to their love but which can never constitute it. Bestowal is the essential element of love.

Many important consequences issue from this conception of bestowal, it seems to me, but I shall keep my discussion to three.

First, bestowal is always and essentially gratuitous. It may occur with rhyme—it often does—but never with reason. It is the free invention of value, emanating solely from the lover's affection and directed solely toward the beloved. It has no end or object beyond her, not even the gratification of the lover's needs, since these require an appraisable value; it proceeds directly and solely to her, to her as a *person*, a *someone*. This is important. It is one means by which Singer attacks the Freudian deterministic concept of love as sublimated narcissism. Singer gives love a content beyond necessity. His argument is analogous to Sartre's, of course, since both men are concerned to restore autonomous selfhood to the human animal, but it seems to me that the idea of gratuitous bestowal is a sharper, simpler counterfoil to nineteenth-century naturalistic determinism than Sartre's ideas of choice and a mankind "condemned to be free."

Secondly, because bestowal is always and essentially gratuitous, it is always and essentially creative. From feeling, the lover creates value, which he bestows upon his beloved, thus creating in her an augmented being; or rather, more strictly, an augmentation of being. At the same time the lover's act is self-creative, an augmentation of his own being, because it enlarges his capacity for response: clearly it would be impossible to create a *value* to which he did not respond. Being as such, then, is the consequence, if not strictly the product, of love. (Singer's concept of bestowal is thus closer in some respects to Jaspers than to French sources.) The meanings of all this for secular philosophy are fairly obvious, and some are obviously dangerous; but for the moment I shall simply say that one important meaning is the freedom of love. Not so much a freedom of choice, as Sartre would have it, for the "selection" of the beloved is always hidden, even if it is not ultimately adventitious; but a freedom of invention, of creativity. It is the freedom of making, rather than the freedom of affirming. Thus the lover's freedom is a continuing enrichment, not a source of anguish, and surely this interpretation is closer to our real experience of love than Sartre's.

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Thirdly, because bestowal is always and essentially creative, it is always and essentially imaginative. That is to say, love is functionally esthetic. Here is where one chief danger lurks. For human imagination operates inevitably in terms of ideals, call them what one will—forms, models, gestalts, universals, noumena, etc. Any artist knows from his working practice that it is impossible to create a representation of anything without the intrusion of prior knowledge; we cannot so much as "see" anything as it actually is—certainly not our beloved. Hence idealization is an inevitable part of love. But we know, too, that the processes of idealization tend to place the image of the beloved under this or that sign, to lead away from a consideration of her as a person and toward a consideration of her as a meaning; ultimately they may end in aims and objects totally separate from her. The trick is to show that this need not be the case, that idealization need not inevitably or necessarily lead away from the person, but on the contrary may lead back to the person and may, so to speak, reinforce the person; and to my mind this is a point which Singer has failed to make with sufficient force. On the other hand, this volume is only the first of several he intends to devote to his theory of love, and I am sure he will have much more to say about idealization later on.

The 350 pages which follow this introductory section of Singer's book are devoted to a critique of the principal theories of love from the beginning of the Greco-Hebraic tradition to the end of the middle ages. Although he obviously has an enormous knowledge of the literature and does not hesitate to bring in obscure texts when he needs them, Singer concentrates on Plato, Aristotle, the Old Testament writers, Lucretius, Ovid, Saint Paul, Plotinus, Augustine, and the medieval writers from Bernard of Clairvaux to Saint Thomas Aquinas, ending with the radical revisionism and reversionism of Martin Luther. Much of this material will be familiar to Singer's readers; any philosopher who decides to proceed in terms of systematic criticism, chronologically arranged, runs the risk of boring his audience. Singer's reading of the texts in question is acute and clear, but not strikingly original. What comes through most prominently from his discussion is an impression of sweetness in the intellectual tone; not so much in the writing as in the sympathy of mind he brings to great writers in the religious tradition. Clearly, although he works from a standpoint outside that tradition, Singer finds much that is attractive in the Christian philosophers, and in the saints and mystics. And who can doubt that their great effort of love, prolonged in intellectual jeopardy over so many barbarous centuries—right if it was right, or wrong if it was wrong—did in fact save the world?

Singer makes two exceptions to his rough chronological arrangement. The first stems from an embarrassment in his materials. Since all his texts come from the period of western religious flowering, Singer lacks naturalistic texts to use for foils. The incipient naturalism in

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parts of Aristotle is not useful for his purpose, and Lucretius is too elementary, while Ovid is a special case. Hence Singer displaces Freud, who on other counts as well is his *bête noire,* from a comfortable niche in our own era, and takes him back to the middle ages to act there as the foremost theoretician of naturalistic love. This is no injustice to Freud, it may even be a kind of honor; yet sometimes the juxtaposition of Freud and Saint Thomas or Martin Luther seems a trifle odd. Perhaps in the circumstances it isn't surprising that Freud always comes off second best.

But the ultimate point of the critical parts of Singer's theory is that both traditions, religious and naturalistic, not only fail to explain love, as we understand it now, but impede it, misdirect it, and even destroy it, at least conceptually. In both cases this happens through the misuse of the processes of idealization. For both philosophies, through their idealizations, direct love away from the person and toward an ideal object existing outside the competence of human valuative faculties, on one hand toward God and on the other toward Nature; and thus they both deny to human love the function of bestowal, which, as Singer has argued, is the indispensable constitutive element. Reduced to this brevity, the argument is full of holes, of course. God is conceived in many ways; so is Nature; the entire evolution of man's loving relationship to both is marvelously intricate. Yet Singer's argument, detailed but not difficult, holds up throughout, I think. It is sound intellectually and experientially, and it points always back toward ourselves. It is the first step toward the accomplishment of the task we must perform for ourselves, an absurd but imperative task: to find a way for modern man to love without sanctions. This is the essence of Singer's book.

But in addition, Singer's critique performs another valuable service, the rigorous redefinition of the chief terms in Christian theories of love, *agapē* and *eros,* as well as the reintroduction of two important subordinate terms, *philia* and *nomos.* All these have been seriously muddled by recent popularizers. (A case in point is a new book[2] by Ralph Harper, an attempted synthesis of sexual and mystical love, to which we turn with good will and much sympathy for the author's earnest intention and knowledgeable manner; yet we find in it the same woolly use of terms, particularly the reduction of *eros* to a virtually meaningless impulse, and the glib concepts that have already estranged us, as reasonably critical readers, from most of the speculative literature of modern love.) Singer has done well to bring semantical precision back into the discussion. He has done it by tracking his terms to their philosophical sources in ancient texts, and then by analyzing their evolution. I don't say this is a unique distinction, for obviously it isn't; but such rigor is unusual, and we are glad to find it in a book of this kind.

[2] HUMAN LOVE: EXISTENTIAL AND MYSTICAL, by *Ralph Harper.* Johns Hopkins Press. $5.50.

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Singer's second departure from his chronology is the omission of the entire episode of Courtly Love in the twelfth century. This, he says, together with its effluence in the Romantic tradition generally, will be the subject of another volume; or possibly two—he does not state his plans exactly. The heresy of *vray amor* and its subsequent influence upon European civilization down to our own time has been for years the special province of Denis de Rougemont, and has been muddled by him, both conceptually and historically, almost beyond belief; so that for this reason alone I should think many people must look forward with agreeable expectation to Singer's next book. But I, for my part, look forward even more enthusiastically to the final volume of his projected series, the one which he will devote to modern love; for then, it seems to me, he must come at last to an end of critique, and must shift his aim to an affirmative philosophy of love—especially, I hope, to the consideration of the role of existential idealization in human love and in life generally.

For isn't the real significance of Singer's work the fact that it is open, at least implicitly, to immense possibilities? By now I am sure many readers of this commentary wonder why I began it by calling Singer's book new and original. What is original about the idea of gratuitous and creative bestowal—except perhaps the term? Isn't it a common part of our attitude to life? It is; and when I began to read Singer's book I said to myself: "But of course, this is what I have thought for years." Creative human love, as a condition of being, is part of our culture; we find it everywhere—in our movies, poetry, fiction, in the hortatory materials that are thrust at us continuously from every moral stronghold, including the religious—to which it ought to be anathema. Love, despite the state of the world, is our existence, and creativity is its touchstone. This is how our loves now work, if they work at all; and this is the idea we try to impress on our frolicsome children when we tell them what is really meant by making love, not war. But all good philosophy takes its materials from the life in which it is born. Singer has crystallized our attitude toward love. And in doing so he has searched out its elements systematically and has made them into a good instrument for criticism. He has a long way still to go. I, no more than another reader, have access to his plans, and all I can say to him is that I hope he won't be deterred by the professional objections his colleagues are bound to raise to his work—objections I would not raise myself, even were I competent to do so. I confess I have a kind of vision: the final overturning of the Cartesian applecart. We have known for a long, long time that the *Cogito* was a false hope, with all its supervening burden of self-divisive consciousness. We know that if we have any virtue in meaninglessness it is our capacity to love. Yet for two thousand years no important new philosophy has begun with this as the explicit starting-point, and I can't help asking myself, naïvely or not: wouldn't it be wonderful it it happened now?

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SIDNEY MONAS

Public and Private Muse

I AM REMINDED SADLY BY SOME OF THE BOOKS under review how shabbily I treated D. S. Mirsky's *A History of Russian Literature* when I reviewed it in these pages fifteen years ago.[1] How testy I was, how eager to lock horns with a grand reputation! Middle age is the leisure allowed one to develop a sense of proportion.

Mirsky wrote in a language that was not his own, while living amidst a decadent bourgeoisie whose ways repelled him. His great, churning erudition, his restless knowledge of Russia and the world, his critical sensibility and his sense of proportion and justice crystallized around the loneliness and helplessness of his exile, and he wrote a masterpiece. In it, a first-rate literary sensibility is both quickened and defined by a strong sense of the public importance of literature, both energized and rendered strange and irritating by the felt presence of the public muse. In and about Russian literature, the public muse almost inevitably lurks; it is rarely present in the modern literature of England and America. Later, Mirsky underwent his conversion to Marxism and returned, at Gorky's invitation, to Russia and his own grim death.

Mirsky's *History* is dense with all sorts of detail, yet orderly, and with an astonishing justice of proportion. He includes all kinds of information, biographical, historical, occasional comparisons with other literatures, odd and interesting details from the texts themselves, and pages of careful and sober analysis, which yet retain a personal, sometimes even a charming idiosyncratic flavor. He deals probingly and at length with the major figures and the major schools, yet he is also full of surprises—books and figures, half or wholly forgotten even in Russia, but worth remembering; when investigated, almost always rewarding. Prince Odoevsky and his *Russian Nights;* Kushchevsky's remarkable "happy Russian," *Nikolai Negorev;* Pomyalovsky and his *Seminary Sketches;* Nicholas Uspensky (not Gleb); Shestov; Rozanov. Books and people are always set in a social and literary context; sometimes Mirsky's language runs a little dry (it was not *his* language) and the pages turn textbooky, a little banal, a bit repetitive, yet on the whole it is a remarkable performance.

Many of his major pronouncements, it is true, ring oddly now to an American ear. About Dostoevsky he felt ambiguously. "The real Dostoevsky," he wrote, "is food that is easily assimilated only by a profoundly diseased spiritual organism." He had a weakness for the aggressively didactic, including Gorky's "revolutionary romanticism." And he cast a baleful eye on the English cult of Chekhov.

Yet his quarrel with Chekhov is surely a *Hassliebe*. He strikes hard against the English taste for elegant despair which was so omnivorous

[1] THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. IV, No. 2 (Summer, 1951), 284.

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that it even attempted to assimilate the stalwart Gorky. (Witness the treatment of *The Lower Depths,* in which the villain Luke, who not by chance bears the *falsely* comforting name of the Evangelist, and whom Gorky rather elaborately "exposes" as a fraud, was presented to English audiences as hero and comforter.) In attempting, to reclaim Chekhov from the cult of elegant despair, however, Mirsky seems not altogether convinced. Of course, Chekhov does not entirely belong. Eagerly Mirsky points out, for example, that remarkable and too easily overlooked story, "Ward Number Six." Yet whatever one might retain from a confrontation with Chekhov's genius at its best, it would not be the felt need for immediate action, for commitment and engagement. Nor would it be a sense of the public value of art, even of "art for art's sake," art as a cultivated and civilized value. Although Chekhov had all kinds of interest in public events, a very keen civic sense and a deep commitment to humane reform, although social details and observations come crowding into his stories and indeed are indispensable to them, his inspiration is the most exclusively private of any Russian writer. All the social knick-knacks are there somehow to be subsumed into a melody that has to do with nature, human nature, an individual, but in which society and public values are merely a frame, a containment, an impenetrable resistance, a setting apart.

Against Chekhov, Mirsky set Gorky, who conceived of art and culture as the active means whereby men of will would and could transform cruel, backward, barbaric Russia into a land fit for human beings. By means of literature, Gorky had after all transformed himself —why not Russia? He would rescue the great qualities of soul manifested in the superb Grandmother of his *Autobiography,* rescue them from the swamp of that passive acquiescence, that false Christian humility before the "inevitablity" of suffering which made even his Grandmother a temptress and a siren as well as a heroine, and push them into the only possible life—, rebellion, dignified by culture. This does not mean, of course, that Mirsky thought Gorky was a better writer than Chekhov!

There has been no book of comparable scope since Mirsky's, either in English or in Russian, that could have the slightest presumption of taking its place. In English at least, most such books have had to live, to a greater or lesser degree, in its shadow. Among the most impressive of these is Helen Muchnic's *An Introduction to Russian Literature.* Her literary sensibility is at least as refined as Mirsky's, though she lacks his enormous erudition and is rather distantly suspicious of the public muse.

In her *Introduction* (recently reissued as a paperback)[2] Muchnic has not yet attained the truly distinguished style of her later book, *From Gorky To Pasternak,* nor does she entirely escape from the atmosphere of the classroom. Her expositions and interpretations of individual

[2] AN INTRODUCTION TO RUSSIAN LITERATURE, by *Helen Muchnic.* E. P. Dutton, $1.65.

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writers are somehow less provocative than his, though they may well be more delicate and more profound. Unlike Mirsky, she concentrates on a handful of major figures whom she invests with a representative quality. By this, something is no doubt gained as well as lost. Russian literature is, for Helen Muchnic, a kind of passionate nostalgia, a kind of commitment that comes from withdrawal. Her pages have their wisdom, but one misses a little that dense and sometimes foolish Mirskian complexity.

From here, the literary histories run downhill, with however many little ups and downs along the way. Henry Gifford's little book[3] is not at the top even of the incline, though it is amiably and slickly written, brief, well-mannered and well-informed, and difficult to quarrel with. He takes his cue—and it isn't a bad one—from Muchnic; he uses the great figures alone, and even a rather limited aspect of their work. His subject is "the novel" rather than literature as a whole, and he takes for granted that everyone knows what that is, even though his first chapter is devoted largely to a strange creature called "a novel in verse." Even when he seems genuinely to have something to say, as he does on the subject of *Oblomov,* his style commits him to brevity and gentlemanly statement and against all fuss and pother and getting wrought up; and so at the one point in his book where I might have wished for more, I find five pages is all I get.

The subtitle is interesting—"from Pushkin to Pasternak"—yet little is done to explain it. Obviously, *Doctor Zhivago,* so allusive to so much in the Russian literature of the past, identifying itself so self-consciously with that literature, and at the same time a token of the emancipation that has reviewed hopes for an ongoing tradition with life and liveliness to offer, has prompted much recent scholarship (at least outside of Russia) to look at the past from the point of view of the present. One might think this would encourage a more intensive, more complex regard for the public as well as for the private muse, but this does not seem to be the case. For eleven pages, for instance, Gifford gibes at Gorky. It isn't hard to do. Gorky's faults, like Dreiser's, make him an easy target, yet scarcely negate his genius. The fact that in the Soviet Union he is written about almost exclusively in terms of hagiography; the fact that he was one of the founders of Socialist Realism; the fact that he was so often so earnest and so literary—these things make it hard to like him as a writer, however appealing his qualities as a man. Nevertheless, he *was* a great writer! The test is that he created a whole host of living, breathing, suffering characters, especially women; and great feminine landscapes, the River Volga, for instance; people and landscapes that haunt the memory of anyone who has read him with a free imagination. And what if his intentions were often different from the result? And why the constant exercise of this word "restraint," as though lack of it were almost the worst crime, when

[3] THE NOVEL IN RUSSIA: FROM PUSHKIN TO PASTERNAK, by *Henry Gifford.* Harper & Row. $1.45.

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committed by a writer of Gorky's talent? Are we then to replace the public police with a merely better-mannered and less well-armed private literary police of our very own?

Like Gifford's book, F. D. Reeve's *The Russian Novel*[4] seems thin. It is longer, more original, more obscure, less well written, less bland perhaps. In the American manner, it tries harder. Still, it smells of the study and cocktail hour and literary salons. There is a kind of murky monologue going on, mumbly and muted, with an occasional interesting and unembarrassed flash, but the occasions are disappointingly rare. Like Gifford, Reeve begins with Pushkin and ends with Pasternak, impelled it would seem to return to Russian literature with *Zhivago* in mind. This is as it should be. The unexpected appearance of a great book that aligns itself so self-consciously with the private muse, with the tradition of Pushkin and Chekhov rather than that of Tolstoy and Dostoevsky, was bound to reawaken an interest in Russian literary tradition more or less in its own terms. What happens, however, is that writers who openly practice what Vera Dunham has called "spokesmanship" tend to get shoved in tight, odd and embarrassing little corners, while the "spokesmanly" qualities of *Zhivago* itself—certainly it has a measure of rather blatant didacticism—tend to be overlooked. In any case, Reeve is at his best with Chekhov, at his worst with Gorky and Tolstoy; his worst is not without the glimmer of intelligence, but even his best is somehow book-bound, study-bound, not quite yet free.

The impact on the world of *Doctor Zhivago* has undoubtedly been greater than that of any novel since *Ulysses;* yet Pasternak has yet to inspire the concentrated and close attention that has been given to Joyce. Indeed, if a book were to be judged by the responses it elicited, *Zhivago* would not fare well. It seems to encourage the vague and amorphous affirmation, or the purely political rejoinder, whether positive or negative. One sometimes turns with a kind of grudging admiration to the perhaps benighted but undoubtedly earnest, thoroughly serious essay with which the Soviet editors of *Novy Mir* rejected the manuscript.

A number of writers, myself among them, have long ago pointed out that the poems at the end of *Zhivago* do not constitute an accidental appendage, a souvenir of the days when Pasternak was merely an obscure lyric poet. They are an integral part of the text, a final chapter; they are indeed the point of the novel, the sum and issue of Zhivago's life. Now, at long last, Donald Davie's amiable Russian Literature industry provides us with a small book that takes this notion seriously —*The Poems Of Doctor Zhivago*[5]—and I must say I opened it eagerly and read the quite intelligent preface with considerable excitement. Then I came on this passage. "If we try," Davie writes, "to justify Zhivago's life without taking his poems into account, we shall fail.

[4] THE RUSSIAN NOVEL, by *F. D. Reeve*. McGraw-Hill. $7.50.
[5] THE POEMS OF DOCTOR ZHIVAGO, by *Donald Davie*. Barnes & Noble. $5.00.

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For the justifications which we shall then find will not be those which Pasternak intended, or would accept." I was caught up a little by "justify" and couldn't help but wonder how even Pasternak went about "justifying" a life, and I wondered too where Davie got his confidence about Pasternak's intentions, especially since in the last year or two of his life Pasternak seemed willing to accept almost any blather that was affirmative and religious enough. But I suppose a thirst for justice has always been the doom of the British, and the need to determine intentions inseparable from the thirst. This, I thought, is no place for a quarrel; the rest of the preface impels one on.

Davie provides a new translation of the *Zhivago* poems, with the original Russian text as a kind of appendix in the back of the book. The translations, whatever their faults, are the best I have yet seen. They have a firm texture and a command over English verse that most other translations have lacked, and they shun padding, silly rhymes, and shifts in meter that indicate the translator's tin ear rather than alterations in the mood or meaning of the poem. Unlike other poets who have tried, Davie has Russian and pays attention to what the Russian says, to the trope as well as to the literal meaning. Here, however, he sometimes goes astray by imposing on some of the poems what seem to me at times rather arbitrary interpretations.

Take Poem Four, called "White Night," and set in St. Petersburg. . . . In the commentary which is the longest part of the book, Davie in an appallingly literal manner attempts to relate each poem to a specific incident, an episode, or set of events in Zhivago's life, and so he frets worriedly over the fact that not once during his life (as Pasternak relates it) does Zhivago visit Petersburg. He recalls that at the end of the novel Moscow is called the "true heroine of this story," and he thinks—aha! the old Slavophile theme, Moscow vs. Petersburg and all that, the old historical capital, "round," familial and unplanned, opposed to the angular imperial capital of arbitrary will, of plan and logic. . . . He recalls that several times during the novel Zhivago identifies himself (as apparently did Pasternak) as a Muscovite. Nothing else in the novel takes place in Petersburg. Speculating in this manner, Davie turns the poem into a rather sinister affair. Night becomes a "bare-footed vagrant," turning in scraps of overheard conversation to the secret police! (As I read the poem, however, night is a "pilgrim-woman," who happens to overhear scraps of conversation that are meaningless to her.) Sinister implications of a distorting "modern" artificiality are also read into Pasternak's use of the word "skyscraper" in this poem. The fact is that there *are* no skyscrapers in Petersburg even to this day; indeed, the city is known, among other things, for the low hang of its skyline, one of the planned little details that impresses the observer with a sense of vast spaces and enormous squares; I do not believe there is a building over twelve stories high anywhere in the city, and Pasternak is obviously using "skyscraper"

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playfully, not literally. There are indeed a number of gentle erotic hints in the poem, and the situation is one of courtship. It strikes me, however, that the key to the poem is in the phrase concerning the girl which Davie translates, not badly, "Kursk-born, attending courses." The Russian says: *"Na kursakh, ty rodom iz Kurska."* The pun is untranslatable, but indicates a transformation, a metamorphosis, a process which is one of the major themes of the novel, and which the poem takes up in more concentrated terms.

Kursk, once an important town, mentioned in the twelfth century Igor Tale, is now a provincial backwater on the edge of the steppe. A girl from Kursk is taking courses at the University of St. Petersburg; the heartland of old Russia is in the process of being transformed by Western Civilization, by science and by poetry, knowledge and ambition; she is being courted by the speaker whom she inspires with poetry; she transforms even as she is being transformed. Thus, Larisa, the Belgian girl with the Greek name, becomes Mother Russia, but quickens and transforms Russia itself in the process. At the end of the poem, the trees come out onto the highway in a kind of wedding procession—an old folk motif. Nature and traditional human nature work upon and change, are worked upon and are changed by, the life of even the most artificial of cities.

It would be folly for me to insist that my interpretation is correct, Davie's wrong; I merely suggest that mine makes more sense in terms of the novel, which are the very terms Davie seems to dwell upon. There are other instances of too much concern with "where" the poem is located in Zhivago's life, too little with what it means in its own right. Davie gives Poem Six the title "Explanation"; the Russian *"Obiasnenie"* means that, but it also means "A Declaration" (as between lovers) and that is the title I would prefer, since nothing in the poem is really *explained.* Nor do I see the point of the Spenserian manner in which Davie renders Poem Thirteen, called "A Fairy Story," even though it is archaic in the original; if one must have a model, surely Coleridge would be more appropriate. But these are quibbles. The real point is that Davie's long and tortuous commentary illuminates almost nothing in the novel; makes it seem indeed denser and more obscure than ever. Nor does the prose of the novel in any way elucidate the poems—not by Davie's technique. Instead of relating the themes, images and structure of the poem-cycle to those of the prose part of the novel, Davie tends to look with a terrible scholastic literalism for the incident in the novel which "inspired" the poem, the set of circumstances from which the poem might have grown. While at worst we are taken on some incredible wild goose chases, even at best we learn nothing about a particular poem, nothing about the cycle as a whole. Surely the detailed biographical criticism of a purely fictive poet has about it a touch of madness. Had the madness more of imagination in it, had it been but a fictive madness,

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we might have another *Pale Fire*. As things stand, we have only rather dull pseudo-criticism.

Talk of Zhivago once more recalls Chekhov with whom Pasternak so closely identifies his hero. Like Chekhov, Zhivago is a medical doctor as well as a poet; he has similar attitudes to life, to women, to politics; he has deep roots in his native land, yet a cosmopolitan, universalist reach. Zhivago, we are also told, sums up within himself the best qualities of the Russian intelligentsia of his period, and Pasternak suggests that these qualities resemble, and are to some extent derived from, those of Chekhov.

I have already mentioned the "Chekhov legend" as it prospered in the England of the 1920's. There is, however, another Chekhov legend, and it owes its existence to the public muse, whose power to distort is at least as formidable as her power to inspire. This legend—perpetuated by Soviet critics, and a few elsewhere, like David Magarshack in England—portrays Chekhov as indomitably strong, buoyant, positive, thrusting into the midst of his bleak picture of the present the prophetic and vibrant hope for a bright, clean, scientific, humane future. This legend holds as literal truth, as *Chekhov's* own statements, what some of his most hopelessly lost characters might say while whistling in the dark.

In any case, Chekhov remains the most elusive of the great Russian writers. Few critics in any language have written of his work with the intelligence and grace it so patently demands. Of course we do have, concerning his life, the inspired memoirs of Gorky, Bunin and Kornei Chukovsky, and these must be understood as commentaries upon the work as well. In English we now have as well the extremely useful, if rather massive and un-Chekhovian biography by Ernest Simmons,[6] whose silence with regard to the work, however, though self-consciously imposed, is rather curious. Under the circumstances, the reissue of Ronald Hingley's brief but lucid and charming critical-biographical study in a paperback edition[7] is a most welcome event, even though it is neither so detailed nor quite so authoritative as Simmons' volume, for it at least attempts to relate the life to the work. If the level is "introductory" it is at least not banal. Yet somehow the author manages to get himself all snarled up in the absurd issue of whether Chekhov was an optimist or a pessimist. Not surprisingly, he comes to the conclusion that Chekhov was a little of both; but he never arrives at a clear vision of the irrelevance and vulgarity of the question in the first place.

What is Chekhov's most characteristic and deepest mood—the mood in which his characters begin to sing their deepest and truest melodies—is not hopelessness, though Shestov called him the "poet of hopelessness," with an emphasis on "poet," but it is certainly beyond

[6] CHEKHOV, by *Ernest Simmons*. Atlantic-Little, Brown. $10.00 and $2.95.

[7] CHEKHOV: A BIOGRAPHICAL AND CRITICAL STUDY, by *Ronald Hingley*. Barnes & Noble. $1.50.

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hope and fear. It is a kind of severance from life that is almost, but not quite, complete; a severance in which the remaining threads that still, after all, hang on, vibrate with a peculiar intensity and a clarity that penetrates the vanity of human wishes and involvements. In his later work at least, Chekhov is rarely far from the Tolstoy who wrote *The Death Of Ivan Ilyich*. But he is more playful, more lightly, more allusively playful than Tolstoy, whose supreme self-confidence gives to his work an unmatched and unmatchable directness. Chekhov is full of humor and irony, yet surely it is folly to deny his poetic melancholy. Hingley does not, in the long run, deny it; but embarrassed by the cult of elegant despair, he tends to make it rather a roundabout and overly complicated issue.

The re-issue of Hingley's brief biography heralds also the beginning of a long-term, large-scale project that has been long overdue. Oxford University Press has finally undertaken a *Complete Works Of Chekhov* in English, in ten volumes, with Hingley as editor and translator. It is, of course, an enormous job of work that calls not only for talent, tact and intelligence on the part of the editor-translator, but enormous reserves of patience and devotion. So far, Volumes 3 and 8 have appeared, the former including the best known plays, the latter, stories written between 1895 and 1897, the beginning of Chekhov's best period.[8] To have some kind of chronological unity, decent footnotes, variant versions, excerpts from letters and notes that bear on the composition, a brief introduction that sets the works in the context of Chekhov's life at the time, decent print and handsomely bound volumes—surely all this is no small blessing. If I carp a little, therefore, about the translation and other matters, my criticisms should be understood in the context of my appreciation for the project as a whole.

Hingley's translation is reasonably accurate, reasonably close to the text, but it is flat. The rich allusiveness of Chekhov tends to get lost. I am reminded that in his biography Hingley remarks that Chekhov got little from his schooling among the Greeks of Taganrog; be that as it may, two of his better known stories play on Greek myth in their very titles ("Ariadne" and "The Darling"—in Russian, *"Dushechka":* "little soul" or "Psyche"). The stories, and even more so the plays, are full of subtle allusions; a banal turn of everyday speech, what seems no more than a dead metaphor, may conceal deeper references to character and situation. Many of these reverberations are lost by Hingley, who concentrates on clarity and readability. Again, let me use a title as a rather unimportant but quick and convenient example. He translates "Anna on the Neck," as "The Order of St. Anne," in order to have his reader immediately understand what is being referred to. The pun and the double meaning are, anyway, repeated in the story where they are given straight. Nevertheless, Chek-

[8] CHEKHOV, Vol. 3. Four Plays. Translated and edited by *Ronald Hingley*. Oxford University Press. $10.00. CHEKHOV, Vol. 8. Short Stories, 1895-1897. Translated and edited by *Ronald Hingley*. Oxford University Press. $5.60.

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hov's titles are extremely important, and one small, delicate emphasis is thereby lost, unnecessarily. In the plays, this flatness of translation seems to me a more serious defect than in the stories, yet it might have been avoided in both; especially since most of the stories and plays printed in these two volumes exist in more than one previous English translation, including (I have in mind especially those by Ann Dunnigan) some really good ones.

In general, Hingley seems to try too hard to make Chekhov transparently available to some imagined common reader. Chekhov turns out, among other things, to use colloquialisms and the vernacular a little more often in Hingley than in the original; and this, I suppose, disturbs me because it is an English, not an American, vernacular. Again, this is a little more disturbing in the plays than in the stories. And in his introductions, Hingley falls considerably below the level of his critical biography. It is almost as though he had nothing new to say and resorted to saying it in terms of more extended simplifications, an elaborate and distorting schematization, as witness the absurd listing of "good" and "evil" characters on page 10 of the *Stories*. The man who earlier attacked the "Chekhov legend" concludes by admitting he cannot escape his English heritage sufficiently not to feel that three of Chekhov's most poignant creations "all deserve . . . a good kick in the seat of the pants."

Those who take issue with the "Chekhov legend" usually cite the remarkable but in some ways uncharacteristic story, "Ward Number Six," which, some would have it, indicates Chekhov's break with Tolstoyan "passive resistance." Both Hingley and Simmons deal adequately and in detail with Chekhov's "Tolstoyism," and I will not go into it here. The story is, among other things, a foreshadowing of some modern speculation on the treatment of the insane (I have in mind Michel Foucault's *Madness and Civilization* and the work of Dr. Szasz) and the gloomier frustrations and embarrassments of our repressive civilization. The insane seem curiously whole and human compared to the world that "commits" them. In Chekhov's story, doctor and patient change places, and the doctor is brutally beaten by the warder whose misdeeds he had chosen to overlook. I must say that I fail to see in this story a clarion-call to rebellion or public action. The doctor is punished, I suppose, for treasuring his own fine feelings above the suffering of his patients, for failing to do what he could within the sphere of his human competence. But surely Chekhov does not mean to suggest that the doctor could have "cured" the patients, or forced society to release them! Yet this story has become the banner of those who propose a "revolutionary" Chekhov, and it is of course with reference to this story that Valeriy Tarsis calls that strange semi-fictional account of his own incarceration in an asylum, *Ward Number Seven*.[9]

The Tarsis case is celebrated, and I scarcely need go into the de-

[9] WARD NUMBER SEVEN, by Valeriy Tarsis. E. P. Dutton. $3.50 and $1.25.

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tails. Nor do I wish to seem ungenerous to suffering and exile and what has obviously been a difficult and painful life. Nor is it my task to delve into some of the rather astonishing and mysterious political maneuverings and jockeyings in which Tarsis has been involved in the past, nor the strangeness of his position in the present. One thing, however, does need to be said, and it had best be said by someone like myself who is not a member of the professional left. And it is this: that, as literature, the book is trash; it does not exist; it rants and raves, meanders and denounces, but there is absolutely nothing "created" in it, not a character, not a mood, not a situation. To compare it to the works of Tertz and Arzhak, as some have done, is sheer foolishness or blindness.

"Luminous with second sight," is how I would describe *The Prose of Osip Mandelstam*.[10] This great, tragic, mad little man, who wrote poetry like Ezra Pound and prose like James Joyce, is virtually unknown outside the ambience of the Russian cultural milieu and now appears in English, if not exactly for the first time, at least decently and properly for the first time, in this splendidly produced little volume of his fictive prose. During his lifetime (he died miserably in 1938, after eight or nine years on the edge of insanity and death, in a concentration camp) Mandelstam produced a few slender books of verse and prose. To this output were added some manuscripts from his first exile, smuggled abroad. The problems of editing him are enormous. There is no authoritative Russian edition. Gleb Struve and Boris Filipov have published a one-volume collection of his verse and prose, and will soon issue a more definitive two-volume edition. A few poems have appeared in Soviet publications. That is all. Yet around this slight, ironical, elusive, witty, physically timid man, a miracle has gathered. He has undergone a second birth. Along with Pasternak and Zabolotsky he has become the inspiration of a whole generation of young poets and intellectuals; and, at the moment, his example is more fruitful than theirs. He is self-consciously surrealist. He throws himself open in a bolder manner to what Freud called "the true reality," that is to say, the unconscious. He is more of an ironist; he not only invites the unconscious, he "entertains" its emissaries with fitting ceremony.

"Second sight" should not obscure, should indeed emerge out of, all the other senses, including the sixth sense. In Mandelstam's prose, especially "The Egyptian Stamp," sight and sound and touch and smell play upon and transform each other, create new images and smash old ones to release a freshness at the core. Musical notation on a page becomes "an insurrection in a German city" which plays upon the locale of Petersburg, the city of hothouse culture in the grip of revolution; a dying Italian soprano, hearing fire-engines raucously sound their horns and sirens, intimating not only fire but the death of

[10] THE PROSE OF OSIP MANDELSTAM, translated with a critical essay by *Clarence Brown*. Princeton University Press. $5.00.

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civilization, is reminded of her operatic debut, and in her imagination comes in on signal from the maestro, wheezing her last aria, not breathing properly, but dazzled by the footlights as she dies; beginnings and ends are played off against each other, time and timelessness; transformations, metamorphoses; through time, from one person to another, from one sense to another, from sound to sight, from smell to sound to image, from low life to high life and back again, the Joycean high-road. . . .

Like Pasternak, Mandelstam was Jewish and became a mystical Christian, but his Jewish background was much closer to him, more of a problem, an unassimilated and provocative fragment—that "Judaic chaos" he wrote about so eloquently in "The Noise of Time" and in "The Egyptian Stamp":

> In Jewish apartments there reigns a melancholy, bewhiskered silence.
>
> It is composed of the conversations between the pendulum and the bread crumbs on the checkered tablecloth and the silver glass holders.

If Pasternak saw himself as a Muscovite and associated himself with the historic "organic" capital of old Russia, Mandelstam the ironist considered himself a product of Petersburg, the impersonal modern city. "Petersburg, you are responsible for your poor son!" he wrote. He tries, like Pushkin, to distinguish himself from his hero, Parnok ("a man of Kamenoostrovskij Prospekt—one of the lightest and most irresponsible streets of Petersburg") but cannot: "And I, too, am sustained by Petersburg alone—the Petersburg of concerts, yellow, ominous, sullen, and wintry," the Petersburg of "desolation and glass."

Memory haunts Parnok (that inhabitant of the new Parnassus) in the form of "a sick Jewish girl" who is also associated with a watchmaker, with the keeping of time, with a watch that Parnok in the city's confusion is accused of having stolen and for which he may be lynched. It shuttles between time and timelessness, between the great age of Russian literature and culture (the first half of the nineteenth century) and its possible demise, between the beginning of realism (Gogol's "The Overcoat") to its end (Mandelstam's "The Egyptian Stamp"), both of which are expressed by the archetypal theme of a little man (Akaky-Parnok) looking for his (assumed) identity in the form of a coat which has been stolen. Mandelstam compares the very city with "a set of galley proofs" (the literature it has produced) and attempts to break down (in a way that must assuredly warm the fibers of Mr. Marshall McLuhan) the "typographical" sense of reality, which is recti-linear, sequential and seeks after causes:

> My pen sketches a beautiful moustached Greek woman and someone's fox-like chin.

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It is thus that arabesques spring up in the margins of first drafts and live independent, gorgeous, and perfidious lives.
Little men shaped like violins drink the milk of the paper.

Parnok is an Egyptian stamp.

Another moustached Greek woman.
And a blank space for the others.

and, again:

Destroy your manuscript, but save whatever you have inscribed in the margin out of boredom, out of helplessness, and, as it were, in a dream. These secondary and involuntary creations of your fantasy will not be lost in the world but will take their places behind shadowy music stands. . . .

Parnok has an alter ego, a Dostoevskian double, Captain Krzyzanowski, who runs off with his coat, his woman, his identity, and who has him lynched for a thief of time, an interrupter of history. Like Parnok, Krzyzanowski is a foreigner in Petersburg, but of a more acceptable kind. Like Parnok, he attends concerts, and he even undergoes a kind of mock death and resurrection; after the February revolution, he goes into hiding for three days, only to be "elected" Captain once more by the soldiers of his regiment. Parnok is a sheep (i.e. a lamb); Krzyzanowski is a horse. But it is Parnok who is resurrected as Mandelstam, and who lives to incorporate the stalwart (but phoney) Krzyzanowski as a temporary image of himself! "A new heroic era has opened in the life of the word," Mandelstam wrote in "The Noise of Time." "The word is flesh and bread. It shares the fate of bread and flesh: suffering."

The youthful and brilliant Andrei Voznesensky descends as much from Mandelstam, whom he never mentions, as he does from Pasternak and Lorca, to whom he pays eloquent tribute. He is strong (as he needs to be under the circumstances), talented, and in his reach and ambition, capacious. Perhaps this makes him sound too solemn; his work also has about it a touch of Marcel Duchamp, dada, and the Beatles. We now have in English, in addition to the rather unreliable translations by Anselm Hollo published two years back, two new volumes of translations, one of them a model of its kind. The drama of Voznesensky's nimble play is there to be observed, as it was perhaps more spectacularly at the poetry readings he gave in this country last spring.

At these readings, how terribly young, how awkward, how altogether "homey" and out of place this homely, tall young man appeared—until he began to read. It was broadly dramatic in the Russian manner; but there was also irony about the Russian manner, a nimble humor that was at the same time tense and confident. He contrasted with his older and professionally practiced translators there on the platform with him, who, though some read their transla-

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tions quite well, seemed to place themselves deliberately out of place, as though they meant to apologize for a poet's appearing in public at all. "An artist true-born . . . is both tribune and trouble-maker," Voznesensky has written. He not only carried the role on-stage, he projected a sense of the cost and the suffering, but also of the delights of the play and the possibility of a real creativity in that very tension.

His poems are the dynamic asides of a very private person in a very public place. Who is the audience? Who is the poet? They become one; they incorporate each other. Worlds are energized by their antiworlds. The poet has his counterpart in Bukashkin (Buggins-Parnok-Akaky), the withered and dehumanized clerk, and even in his socialist-realist critic who grows "an anti-head." The self-affirmed genius Andrei Voznesensky looks back and tries not to let go of "Andriusha"; he cries from the platform of a train to a receding feminine figure "Save me!" The poet is an airport, a center of world-communication, into and through which the outcasts of the world must pass and be transformed. Poetry is a severed head in the hands of power, speaking not only to the drama-stricken multitude that watches, but in bubbles of blood to the very hands of power that dangle it. Worlds and antiworlds are ineluctably interlocked and in their high-tension become each other: "If you live, you burn!"

The volume of selections by Herbert Marshall is, on the whole, an improvement over Anselm Hollo; but it is still an awkward and in places a careless performance.[11] Beside the fact that Marshall has no poetic gift and his too often inverted phrasing and elephantine word-play seek the stature of poetry through poetic license alone, his attention seems inopportunely to stray, so that even his real virtues—his knowledge of Russian and of the locale of the poems—sometimes fail him. A Moscow suburban-train could *not* be strewn with orange peelings (p. 18); there is no good excuse for three crucial lines appearing in the wrong section of a poem (p. 34); no one has any idea what an "attic booking-office" (p. 36) might be; and "the subjugation of essential construction" (p. 36) is the opposite of "overcoming *in*-essential construction," or "getting rid of excrescences," which is what the original says. The introduction and the notes contain useful information, but there is something drastically wrong with their tone. Mr. Marshall, for many years a resident of Moscow and an admirer of the Party, seems suddenly to identify himself with the rebellious artists, almost to the point of straining our credulity. His vaunting of the unabashed fearlessness of "the younger generation" is indeed flatly contradicted by a publisher's note included at Voznesensky's request to the effect that the "statements and conclusions" about the poems by their "authorized" translator are not those of the poet.

In contrast to Marshall's volume, *Antiworlds*[12] is done with scrupu-

[11] VOZNESENSKY: SELECTED POEMS, translated by *Herbert Marshall*. Hill & Wang. $4.50.

[12] ANTIWORLDS, edited by *Patricia Blake* and *Max Hayward*. Basic Books. $4.95.

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lous care and imaginative attention. The collaboration between a sensitive and intelligent scholar of Russian who also knows the current Soviet scene extremely well (Max Hayward) with various accomplished and gifted English and American poets, as well as the skill and taste of the editors, have produced felicitous results. Yet even here, there is some unevenness. Stanley Kunitz, for instance, renders masterfully "Fire in the Architectural Institute" and "I am Goya"—but in "The Skull Ballad" he goes completely astray. The crucial line, spoken by the severed head, *"Kak ty liubish' menia, Epokha!"* meaning, "My, how you love me, epochal one!" or, "How you just can't help loving me, Big Boy!" is rendered by Kunitz, "Progress you drive me mad for you," which is exactly wrong. Again, lines from a fine poem ("Who are We?") which Marshall renders literally:

> Independent of our works the epoch
> vaccinated us like smallpox

Stanley Moss translates with poetic understanding:

> We are inoculated
> against time, with time . . .

Yet in the same poem Moss inserts "A little fawn in heat . . ." which violates not only an elementary knowledge of nature, but also the beauty of Voznesensky's Russian diminutive *"samochka"*—a little female self. Such clinkers are few, however. The notes and introduction are extremely useful; cautious, measured, but also informative and eloquent. In the foreword by Auden, restrained and dignified as it is, there may or may not be, but I think there is, a certain repressed feeling of close kinship with Voznesensky. Auden is Uncle Wystan now, a wise, benevolent, thoroughly domestic figure, in whom the private and public realms are carefully marked off, defined and separated; but once he was the *enfant terrible* of modern poetry, and it is the old Auden that Voznesensky to some degree resembles.

Russia now is alive with poetic *enfants terribles*. Few are as talented or inspired as Voznesensky; but Voznesensky stands by no means alone, nor is his inspiration merely personal. If the younger generation is not so impossibly bold and openly rebellious as Marshall claims, neither is it easily tamed or silenced. Regardless of the ultimate stature of the verse being produced (and we carry too many academies in our heads; we tend to worry too much about ultimates) Russia is now an exciting place for poetry. The ferment of Mandelstam's "word" becoming bread is everywhere attested, and most authoritatively by Mihajlo Mihajlov in his book *Moscow Summer*[13] (it was the summer of 1964), which has become an historical incident in its own right.

[13] MOSCOW SUMMER, by *Mihajlo Mihajlov*. Edited by *Andrew Field*. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $4.50.

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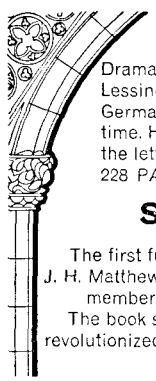
Born in Yugoslavia, the son of a Russian émigré, a socialist with mystical Christian leanings, a scholar of Russian literature with a fine feeling for poetry and the creative life, young, hopeful, exuberant, Mihajlov haunted Russia for thirty intense days, met an incredible number of the crucial people, who almost invariably responded to his intensity with a generosity matching his own; and then wrote in the simplest and most transparent of prose everything he could remember of what transpired. If I were to use a single phrase to characterize his account, I would say "purity of heart." It is a profoundly honest, utterly unassuming and unpretentious book—so honest, it seems almost naive. After his return to Yugoslavia and the publication of most of the present book, Mihajlov was dismissed from his university post, arrested, then released, but only partially reinstated, and his present situation in Yugoslavia seems rather ambiguous and difficult to determine.

For an insight into public and private muses as they fare in Russia today, the book is matched only by Olga Carlisle's *Voices in the Snow* and by the excellent anthologies of current literature compiled by Patricia Blake and Max Hayward. Yet it has in addition a quality of its own, a quality of innocence and clarity and directness that makes it literature in its own right, though it may be that Mihajlov's gifts as a literary critic are not of a very high order.

There is something intrusive and annoying about Andrew Field's



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Introduction, and about a number of his comments in footnotes and elsewhere. He is certainly a competent and well-informed editor, but it strikes me as rather uncomprehending that he should refer to this book as "juicy literary gossip," though no doubt the same level of information concerning, say, literary life in New York or Boston would be just that. The interest of Mihajlov is surely not in his "gossip," but in the spirit he catches without really half trying, the spirit at the very heart of Russian literary life. In the same way, Field will break in via footnotes to argue with Mihajlov's taste, his judgment on this or that particular writer or work. Worst of all, he introduces a "cold war" note which is alien to the spirit of Mihajlov. Nevertheless, much of the information he provides is useful, and the inclusion of Mihajlov's letter to a Yugoslav literary editor is illuminating and important.

The sum of what Mihajlov sees as opening up among almost all the talented young poets and writers of Russia is the gateway to the unconscious. He would perhaps not put it that way. No doubt he would instead talk about "the spirit"—yet the gist is clear, and clearly translatable. Young artists are straining to entertain the unexpected, to train themselves in the forms and ceremonials that will enable them to entertain motifs that rise from the depths. The deepest experiences of the last generation well up into song—the moving songs of the concentration camps, as sung by young people, especially the students, as though they told of their own personal experiences. Men like Pasternak, Mandelstam, Zabolotsky, women like Tsvetaeva and Akhmatova, assume heroic stature, become themselves the subject of song and legend. And living men, too: the old-fashioned and Tolstoyan Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, the communist Tvardovsky, and the brilliant young surrealist, Andrei Voznesensky. Mihajlov documents, too, the confusion of private and public that is so characteristic of the present situation, the last desperate stand of Socialist Realism (that is to say, the claims of Party consciousness and Party authority as guides for transforming life) and the thick gloom of repeated minor repressions and reactions. From the value placed on the spontaneous and melancholy songs of Bulat Okudzhave, the unexpected sounds and imagery of Voznesensky, the poignant drama of Kazakov's "outcasts," it is clear that the unconscious wells up with ever-increasing force in current Russian literature. Longings for privacy, autonomy, "rights," individuality, jostle with the old aspirations for a communist future; the only way that points to any possible reconciliation, to any resolution short of destruction, to a resolution that will be also an "*Aufhebung*," is in the direction of Molly Bloom's night thoughts, a literature that will make the unconscious conscious, a literature without repression, a literature in which the old conflict between public and private that weighed down Rome as well as Russia will have been transcended.

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GEORGE P. ELLIOTT

Poetry Chronicle[1]

FOR SOME REASON THE WRECKERS have not moved in on poetry yet, as to varying degrees they have moved in on painting, music, theater, and fiction. Maybe the strength of poetry now scares them away. Since the war, I believe, there have been more good poets in America than in any equivalent era since the early seventeenth century in England, and our poetry embraces an enormous range of technique and experience, from J. V. Cunningham's flawless classical epigrams to A. R. Ammons' long skinny adding-machine-tape poem, from the spiritual death agonies of young Sylvia Plath to William Carlos Williams' celebration of his love of his wife written in his old age. How much of this poetry is great has not been revealed to me. Perhaps a more manageable question is: how much will endure? My guess is that a lot of it will, greatness not being the only reason a poem comes to life and keeps on living. Of course there is too much feeble and non and meretricious poetry around, but it does no more harm than bad poetry ever does; it hasn't even summoned a Pope to scourge it. The anti poets have an evergreen grove of their own where they play at wrecking—sometimes rather amusingly—and when a big one comes out at random, as Karl Shapiro did three years ago in *The Bourgeois Poet,* he doesn't seem to get much effective subverting done. Good pro poetry keeps right on a-birthing anyhow.

One peep for freedom from the strictures of art is *Miracles: Poems by Children of the English-speaking World,* collected by Richard Lewis, with the assistance of UNESCO. There is nothing wrong with children's poetry when you know and are fond of the children who wrote it, nor is there anything wrong with making a collection of it for

[1] MIRACLES, edited by *Richard Lewis.* Simon and Schuster. $4.95. FREEDOM SCHOOL POETRY, compiled by *Nancy Cooper.* Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee, Atlanta, Georgia. $1.50. CHANGE OF ADDRESS, by *Kathleen Fraser.* Kayak. $1.50. BATTLE REPORT, by *Harvey Shapiro.* Wesleyan. $1.85. TELL ME, TELL ME, by *Marianne Moore.* Viking. $3.95. A BEGINNING, by *William Burford.* Norton. $4.50. SELECTED POEMS, by *Karen Gershon.* Harcourt, Brace and World. $3.95. POEMS 1955-1965, by *Dom Moraes.* Macmillan. $4.95. STAYING ALIVE, by *David Wagoner.* Indiana, $3.50. WEATHERS AND EDGES, by *Philip Booth.* Viking. $4.50. MOSTLY PEOPLE, by *Jeannette Nichols.* Rutgers. $4. DAMNED UGLY CHILDREN, by *Andrew Glaze.* Trident. $3.95. AN UPLAND PASTURE, by *Theodore Holmes.* Vanderbilt. $4. COLLECTED POEMS, by *Robert Graves.* Anchor. $1.75. THE NEW LIFE, by *Dante,* translated by *William Anderson.* Penguin. $0.95. THE INFERNO FROM LA DIVINA COMMEDIA OF DANTE ALIGHIERI, translated by *Warwick Chipman.* Oxford. $2.00. THE COMEDY OF DANTE ALIGHIERI, translated by *Mary Prentice Lillie.* The Grabhorn Press. (n.p.l.) THE DIVINE COMEDY, translated by *Louis Biancolli.* Washington Square. $20.00.

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some extraneous purpose such as propaganda, as SNCC has done in *Freedom School Poetry*. (Most of the poems in this collection are by adolescents and only one could ever have been published on its merits in a literary magazine worth reading. This one, "Who What Dropped When," is by a child whose name and age are not specified, and it is about a subject which has nothing to do with SNCC's political aims. It must have been included for no other reason than that it is so much better than any of the others.) But to insist, as the publisher and editor of *Miracles* do, that the poems "invite serious attention as *poetry*" is as pure a hunk of sentimental noblesavagery as I have come across in a while. Rousseau cleansed the heart of The Child of all that sin Augustine had filled Its soul with, but I'd thought Freud had jam-packed Its psyche again with all manner of devious vileness. Apparently not. Nowadays, it seems, The Child is Creative. Well, it's true that there are some things children are good at—for example, they are marvelous at opening their arms. But the test of a poem is how well the words are put together, not how creative its author is, and Blake at twelve, though he had already written better poetry than most people ever do, was nothing like as good as Blake at twenty, or thirty, or fifty. This is by a boy of seven.

I love you, Big World.
I wish I could call you
And tell you a secret:
That I love you, World.

As a kind of arm-opening those words melt me, all right, and I'd like to have hugged the child that uttered them. But the pedophilia which confuses this quatrain with real poetry must, like Esperanto and computer verse, be flicked off the body literary and forgotten.

Kathleen Fraser is in favor of growing up, and she celebrates having made it in a poem as delightful as its title, "Poem in which My Legs are Accepted." Her poems are personal and the verse is free: everything depends on what sort of persons she is, or persona she projects, and on her ear. She (or her persona, if there is a difference) is good, and so is her ear. Here is from a blues.

I remember being beautiful
it smelled good
he liked me so much the others were shadows
in the sheet game
we sat and watched them together

Good, but not quite horribly good. That is, the horror has not got into her yet, or, if it has, she has not got it into the poetry—consciousness of her own evil, that more than blues which would extort from her more than limpid, warm-hearted verses. Here is from another blues.

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Then my first child,
the size of a tulip bulb
still buried in winter,
left me for the river.
I feel lonesome
and have no plan.

Of course, maybe she is not only good but fortunate and never will have to suffer the horror. Fortunate as a woman, that is, more than as a poet.

Yin and Yang.

The main subject of Harvey Shapiro's best short poems is consciousness of failure, defeat, lack, and his success is to suggest the sadness impeccably. This is "Epitaph."

To make nothing out of nothing
Was all my study.
I had a wife to help me.
Though I came out bloody,
I made nothing out of nothing.

This is more epigrammatic than most of his poems, though over the years they have been getting shorter as they have gotten better, and it will memorize itself fast if you let it. I don't know what more to say about his perfect, fragile poems. I wish he were not so unhappy, not just unhappy.

Unless you are already a devotee of Marianne Moore's poetry, this is not the book to start with: manner has turned into mannerism, and her optimism has become extensive. There are a few beautiful lines to remind you of one reason why her poetry is held in high regard. Here is the first stanza of a little poem she wrote for the dancer Arthur Mitchell.

Slim dragonfly
too rapid for the eye
    to cage—
contagious gem of virtuosity—
make visible, mentality.
Your jewels of mobility

Those last two lines are excellent in suggesting something of what he, as perhaps any fine dancer, does. But the remaining three lines of the poem, printed as a separate stanza, turn away.

reveal
  and veil
    a peacock-tail.

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Perhaps they refer to Mitchell's role as Puck in Balanchine's *Midsummer Night's Dream* (a footnote says that the poem first appeared in a New York City Center souvenir program), and perhaps the lines would charm one who had seen that ballet. I did not see it, and to me they sound frivolous.

In the last, and best, of four little essays she includes in this book, Miss Moore defines the limits within which she works (and which sanction her quirkiness). "Poetry is the Mogul's dream: to be intensively toiling at what is a pleasure." "Grudges flower less well than gratitudes." To both of which statements one must reply, Not always, dear lady. Here and elsewhere, she disdains the vile and nasty and will not admit them. What lovelier quality could one ask for in a friend or editor? But in a poet this is surely a stupendous handicap—Blake without grudges, Pope full of gratitudes? What of the terrible joys? Miss Moore also says: "It is for himself that the writer writes." She does not say, or mean, "for himself primarily," implying that the writer is really speaking to the rest of us also. She says, without qualification, "for himself." This is true of any poet some of the time, and of a few poets most of the time (Emily Dickinson or M. B. Tolson). The trouble is that those who talk so much to themselves are likely to get more and more quirky and self-indulgent. This is from the title poem, "Tell Me, Tell Me."

> a James, Miss Potter, Chinese
> "passion for the particular," of a
> tired man who yet, at dusk
> cut a masterpiece of cerise—
>
> for no tailor-and-cutter jury—
> only a few mice to see,
> who "breathed inconsistency and drank
> contradiction," dazzled
> not by the sun but by "shadowy
> possibility." (I'm referring
> to Henry James and Beatrix Potter's Tailor.)

Of her poetic practise, Miss Moore also says: "I think books are chiefly responsible for my doggedly self-determined efforts to write; books and verisimilitude: I like to describe things." Her accomplishment is to describe well and without malice things that catch her fancy and to do this in a way that suits her fancy whether it suits anyone else or not. The best of excerpters, she takes ideas and phrases from her wide and happy reading and sets them in a firm, moral mastic, thereby composing very fanciful, and here and there delightful, mosaic poems. "Jewel" and "gem" are words she likes, and the last poem in this book is "Sun." The first line of the first poem, which is addressed to the Brooklyn Bridge, goes: "Enfranchising cable, silvered by the sea." But in fact the bridge, cables and all, is repainted every ten years or so, and of course the paint is constantly being sullied by New York's

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aerial sewage. Is this substantial truth less interesting, really, both in itself and as a subject for a poem, than a whimsical sea-silvering of the unpleasantness?

Each age has its committee poetry—interchangeable verses written by skilled craftsmen when they feel like writing a poem but have nothing much to say. William Burford entitles his third book *A Beginning*. Here is "Nuns at an Airfield."

I
Black-robed those Muses,
Watching the long planes
That rise up slowly
On smoking wings

II
They themselves, in their
Flaming robes, winged headdresses,
Holding the rail at the edge
Of the great world of air—
Almost ascend
On the rushing wind
They stand against
With ecstatic faces,
Bright cheeked, partaking
Of the Creation
Which destroys and makes,
Burning, propelled by
Its fuels and luminous saints,
These ships of the fleet.

Four hundred years ago these women would not have been nuns and would probably have had lips as red as cherries and eyes as black as berries. Now, the nuns are Muses, their black robes flame, they partake of a Creation that destroys, they *probably* become airplanes of some divine fleet, and it would be hard to say what the scansion is. A committee poem looks like a real poem and it gets off the page like a real poem, but, no matter how hard it presses, it never gets past the retina or the eardrum in to where you live.

Karen Gershon is at an extreme from Burford: she is no technician and she aspires to wisdom.

Who wants the future must
come to terms with the past
that peoples rise and fall
makes equals of us all
let none claim precedence
for his inheritance

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and there shall be no cause
for which men die by force

If truisms like these are to turn into poetry, they must be turned superbly. It is only when Miss Gershon is compelled to speak about what is of profound importance *to her* that she overcomes the defect of her ear. A few of the passages in these poems are splendid in the accuracy and honesty of their statement. This is the third stanza of "Kaddish," a poem in memory of her parents, whom the Nazis exterminated

It was the greatest wrong of all
to make their dying bestial
so that it is incongruous
to think of them as glorious
I mourn my parents without pride
I see them as their killers did
who by degrading me as well
are beyond death victorious

Submerged in this book is the moral autobiography of an honest woman who is, unfortunately, only occasionally a good poet. She is especially rare among confessional poets these days: she presents her suffering as ennobling and redemptive, and she ends with praise. The last line of the book concludes a poem addressed to her children: "your presence changes my wilderness to a garden."

Dom Moraes is one of the best practitioners of poesy in the business. When he gets hold of a fit little subject, he has the craft to doll it up as it has never been dolled before. Here is the fourth and last stanza of a poem taking off from "Goosy Goosy Gander."

In my Lady's chamber
Once I found a skull.
It helped her to remember
That she was beautiful.
If I find the moral
That is all my wish.
Men have fetched up coral
When they trawled for fish.

Unfortunately, most of the subjects which have come to him for treatment do not respond well to his style of maquillage. An example is the opening quatrain of a sonnet on Santa Claus.

His sullen kinsmen, by the winter sea,
Said he was holy: then, to his surprise,
They stripped him, flayed him, tied him to a tree,
Sliced off his tongue, and burnt out both his eyes.

I had not realized the grisly had become *that* chic, even in London.

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According to *Staying Alive,* David Wagoner has been having a rough time recently. One is sorry for his trouble, but it surely has been good for his poetry. Not that he's jolly pervert of estheticism, cultivating spiritual pain so as to have something to write about; it is forced upon him and the poems contain it. When he is not in pain, he is just the chairman of the Wagoner Poetry Committee, which turns out such items as a catechism poem no more inspired than its title, "The Shooting of John Dillinger Outside the Biograph Theater, July 22, 1934," or an emblem poem, "Song to Accompany the Bearer of Bad News," telling you you may tear the poem lengthwise (which he does by making the lines half-length for a while) and then putting the phrases together to suit yourself (as he does, to suit himself). Not bad really; in fact, sort of fun. But all you'd need is the right D.W. kit to make them yourself. The good poems, of which there are a couple of dozen, are openly about himself and are all his.

He is witty as need be; his ear is reliable; he knows how to elevate the colloquial without inflating it; he is especially good at endings, in the last phrase or trope throwing you out in a direction you hadn't expected or back into the thereby altered poem itself. In "Making Up for a Soul" the poet is addressing his love; these are the last lines of the poem.

> There are snap-on souls like luminous neckties
> That light up in the dark, spelling our names.
> Let's put them on for solemn visitors,
> Switch off the lights, then grope from room to room,
> Making our hollow, diabolical noises
> Like Dracula and his spouse, avoiding mirrors,
> Clutching each other fiendishly for life
> To stop the gaps in ourselves, like better halves.

These immediately available poems stand up to rereading, though they are not much improved by it. But a tiny handful—I haven't known them long enough yet to be sure how many—do not yield their meaning at first reading and call you back again and again. "By the Orchard" is one of this kind, about falling apples but even more about its own motions, which are lovely. "Talking to the Forest" is assured and mysterious and vivifies everything it touches, a buffalo in a zoo, such a bland old expression as "rain or shine," even the reader. It is about what the title says it is about, and beneath that it is still about what the title says; but beneath *that* beneath, I cannot say what it is about.

Philip Booth in his poetry keeps such a tight prosodic rein on his feelings that at first they appear to be rather tame. Many of them, though not tame, which implies broken and brought down, are so gentle that they might benefit from a bit more freedom. "I thought I knew, for once,/ how it was with the world./ And I cannot tell you. Except/ that the gray cat, who slept/ on my desk all morning,

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curled/ against waking, woke to claw/ at my pipe smoke." But some of his feelings are wild enough, and a couple of the poems in this, his third and best, collection are about his struggle with them. In "Deer Isle" he is "a commuter/ trapped by a detour sign/ at dusk," and he sees six does "feeding on frozen/ winesaps, fat and white-rumped/ as the drivers who sat in their cars." He is reminded of a buck he saw one March six years before "limp out of the spruce and snow/ to ease his gut in a hummocky meadow." But now he is in his car

> parked miles beyond choice,
> miles from home on a blocked curve
> in the dead mist of a thick suburban preserve.
>
> My guts clamped. I honked my way clear,
> tramping the gas toward nowhere
> but where home was. My wife understood.
> If I didn't go now, I never would.

The poem balances yearning for the wild, gentle, free natural life and rage at the clamping, indecorous life which we actually lead, which threatens to lead us: "Late, caught in the neuter/traffic, driven beyond where I wanted/ to go." The poem neither floats away into fantasies of freedom nor dissipates into invective. It is civilized, and counts the cost.

But sometimes his feelings are off this whole natural-civilized scale, though his meters remain controlled and controlling.

> The day the tide went out,
> and stayed, not just at Mean
> Low Water or Spring Ebb,
> but out, out all the way
> perhaps as far as Spain,
> until the bay was empty,
>
> it left us looking down
> at what the sea, and our
> reflections on it, had
> (for generations of
> good fish, and wives fair
> as vessels) saved us from.

This poem is good enough to let you imagine what it is about, and imagining that can shake you. "The Ship" transcends this and all the others he has written.

"The Ship" is like Wagoner's "Talking to the Forest" in this: what it seems to be about is perfectly clear but what it is finally about I cannot say, though I know and if anyone else should try to say I would close my ears. Both these poems are too long to quote entire and too magical to work in part. It would not be pleasing to live in a world which would let them vanish.

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In our age it seems that if a poet makes it past sixty he has a good chance of dying well. Last year at the age of sixty-six, M. B. Tolson died in the course of nature. Those who knew him and those who thought well of his poetry could mourn him without perplexity. He was not in the literary swim, and his work is not as well known as it should be. His poetry is difficult like Hart Crane's or Pound's, but the scholar-critics it needs have not got to work on it yet. The time is surely past in America when a body of poetry suffers neglect if its author is a Negro, but not if he leads an obscure life in Oklahoma, mayor of a little town, professor in a university without importance in the world of the mighty. Tolson's *Libretto for the Republic of Liberia* was composed for the squarest of occasions, as an official part of a national centennial exposition, of which he was appointed poet laureate. Even so, like a good deal of *Harlem Gallery,* the poetry is authentic. Whether the flaws of his poetry damage it so severely that only passages can be rescued, I am not sure, but I am sure that the matter is a fit subject for general discussion.

In the past couple of years, two other poets much better known than Tolson died in their early fifties, Randall Jarrell and Delmore Schwartz. But they died, as so many of our poets under sixty die, ambiguously. A few kill themselves outright, but more disappear, develop obscure maladies, do something in a fit of madness, or attack their hearts. I think the gravest problem our age sets a poet is what to do with his own evil. Words are a poet's food, and whatever else consuming the words of this century does to him, it is likely to fill and overfill him with a sepsis of rage. If he is lucky, he may be able to make poems that contain it. These two poets raged, and were not lucky. We must mourn them doubly.

After such generalizations, it behooves one to qualify. Jeannette Nichols provides the example of a competent poet who says decent things in decent verse. Her poems are like Christmas-card letters from a sane, reliable, honest old friend. That they are little more than this, she herself explains very well in "Mirror."

> Mother you are
> not, nor child, nor lady yet as excellent
> as your dreaming. Great stranger,
> old accuser, last and only hater,
> love is your saver. Alien of the clean
> glass, we speak mornings and evenings
> carefully casual, eternally
> the other's leaner. But always
> our eyes go strange rather than recognize
> a dangerous truth.

She has not come to terms with her evil: she has come to terms with not having come to terms with it. Who is to blame the woman? But the poetry suffers.

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Andrew Glaze writes low-temperature poetry exquisitely whimsical about things that matter. This is the opening paragraph of "My "South."

> Before me, it was grandpa's old mad South,
> the funhouse of principle.
> A sort of Baptist revival in a whorehouse,
> with violent rapes in the purities,
> and John Locke snatching up the souls
> and boiling them down into Presbyterian whisky.

John Locke? Surely the context calls for John Knox. Maybe Locke is a misprint? What the passage says is worth saying and the poem, which is fairly long, expands the idea consistently and effectively. But the wit of "rapes in the purities" is in the wrong key, somewhere easy between Oscar Wilde and *Time*. Later in the poem he says that, sad as it is to be born defective, it is much more terrible

> to be reared without one's own consent
> in the cave of the mind like a faded fish
> and to go as assuredly blind in the soul as a saint.

Good enough, and quite well put, up to that last phrase, which is no misprint. Beyond a flippantly surrealistic reversal, what does it mean to say a saint is blind in the soul? One is tempted to think of the different irony with which Plato's Socrates would have put the whole idea of these lines.

Imagine a window display in a very chic East 50's store, so elaborate and exquisite that it is not advertising any product, just calling attention to the store itself—camp surrealism. Then suppose the display transplanted a couple of blocks to the Museum of Modern Art; there, its art is no longer commercial but pop. Imagine it back in a store window, but this time of an art gallery on Madison in the 70's—commercial again but in a different way, camp pop. Then a new twist: it is in a window in this same block but the store behind it is empty, there is no frou-frou little boutique it is calling attention to, no gallery even. It must be some sort of elaborate joke? But on whom? The central figure is a mannikin with a window in the middle of his chest. What does it signify, here? Now, suppose the display transported intact to a store window in the best block in Birmingham, Alabama (where Mr. Glaze comes from). In your shock you really look at it, and don't know what to think.

> This is my South!
> What do I do about it?
> How do I get this belonging out of my belly? . . .
> All for fun, that isn't allowed for in the rules,
> everything turning to moral service—like murder.
> —to drink to forget we drink we forget we live. . . .

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It makes us able to go on drinking death
and never connecting with the taste of it.

My God, you gasp, that's a real heart! You don't know what to feel. From certain obscure prickles you suspect that you are feeling a great deal but that, as the poet says, you are not connecting with it. But maybe you aren't feeling anything. How is the rage vented?

Theredore Holmes is tended by an authentic muse, with a strong sense of beat and line, interested in the world, playful as an otter. Unfortunately she is spastic, bumps against him clumsily for a line or two at inopportune moments, seizes him for whole poems of divine inflation. I cannot recall when I last read a poem in such bad taste as "The Kennedys," and here from "The Lobster Pot" is a succession of four similes, each within itself and the four among themselves in a death-struggle between the obvious and the inept.

Sunk there with its catch, like the fly behind the pane in the window,
Like the frenzy of life trying to escape the body that holds it,
The artist trying to find expression for himself in his material,
Or the human endeavor to find a home for itself in the release of its soul.

And here is the Big Idea with which "The Sea" ends:

and, when you come back next day to see your footprints
returned by the sea to the sand, you will understand what it is saying.

But occasionally he gets through a poem, not too long a poem, unseized and unbumped, especially when the subject is humble. "The Duck" is one of these delightful, authentic, unclumsified poems, and the simile illuminating this image also says something about a poet who has big dry thoughts.

All the waves about him seem to radiate towards the land
Which his adaption to the water so ill-fits him for:
A body that in its bulk sways when he moves;
The large paddles of his feet
Like the thoughts a thinker drags through the world.

The loveliest poem in the book is "The Stream," in which thoughts are not dragged but are used for graceful propulsion and don't mean much. "The stream had the dream of a bridge."

In his most recent volume Robert Graves has collected nearly three hundred poems. Not one of them is positively bad. Many of them you could have—and some you very likely have—read in *The New Re-*

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public, The New Statesman, or *The New Yorker.* Not just have looked at them but really have enjoyed them, read them there as well as you can read them here in a book. They are short; they are graceful and intelligent; they are conventional, sometimes archaic; they inspire quick, untroubling emotions. Editors of liberal weeklies know better than to admit among their columns any but the well-shorn poem. "Beauty in Trouble" provides a kind of paradigm of a weekly poem (and also of the minifying power of easy meters). This is the last of seven quatrains.

> Virtue, good angel, is its own reward:
> Your guineas were well spent.
> But would you to the marriage of true minds
> Admit impediment?

A handful of Graves' poems, as everyone who cares about poetry knows, are the real, hairy thing. They are like the weekly verses, only so much better as to be of a different kind; instead of footnoting an experience, the provide one. His genuine poetry is tough, sometimes humorous ("Down, Wanton, Down!"), sometimes malicious ("The Undead"), always very conscious—Apollonian in tone, whatever it might be in content. "In Broken Images" seems to me one of the best.

> He is quick, thinking in clear images;
> I am slow, thinking in broken images.
>
> He becomes dull, trusting to his clear images;
> I become sharp, mistrusting my broken images.
>
> Trusting his images, he assumes their relevance;
> Mistrusting my images, I question their relevance.
>
> Assuming their relevance, he assumes the fact;
> Questioning their relevance, I question the fact.
>
> When the fact fails him he questions his senses,
> When the fact fails me, I approve my senses.
>
> He continues quick and dull in his clear images;
> I continue slow and sharp in my broken images.
>
> He in a new confusion of his understanding;
> I in a new understanding of my confusion.

I should like to mention two curiosities connected with Graves' poetry. One is his insistence on his service to the White Goddess. It is true that he talks about experience of the Goddess in a lot of his poems, especially as she manifests herself in a woman he loves; but apparently he has persuaded himself that poetry which talks about love and the Goddess is therefore itself Dionysian. It isn't.

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Who calls her two-faced? Faces, she has three:
The first inscrutable, for the outer world;
The second shrouded in self-contemplation;
The third, her face of love,
Once for an endless moment turned on me.

"An endless moment" indeed! Occasionally, very rarely, some lines of his are rapt with Dionysian intensity, though never, unfortunately, for a whole poem.

At sunset, only to his true love,
The bird of paradise opened wide his wings
Displaying emerald plumage shot with gold
Unguessed even by him.
True, that wide crest
Had blazoned royal estate, and the tropic flowers
Through which he flew had shown example
Of what brave colors gallantry might flaunt,
But these were other. She asked herself, trembling:
'What did I do to awake such glory?'

The idea of the poem and the first and third sentences are so marvelous that it would have been worth it to him to have sacrificed ten years of new-weekly exertions in order to have wrought the still-unfinished second sentence which is needful for "Bird of Paradise" to be all there, to become immortal, worthy of the Goddess.

The second curiosity is this. Reading the poems in this book without knowing anything about the author, you would gather from some waspish stings along the way that he thinks quite ill of the age. But it is hard not to know a great deal about Robert Graves. Where in the poetry is the terribleness *in himself* which has kept him for most of his life in voluntary exile from both his country and his century?

Maybe these two curiosities are connected. I am not sure how. But there they are.

Since I reported eight years ago,[2] I know of five new translations of Dante, of which I have been able to get hold of four. William Anderson's *The New Life* is easier to read than Rossetti's, but it is not much more faithful to the Italian and as poetry in English it is far less beautiful. Warwick Chipman's *Inferno* is in *terza rima,* a handicap he overcomes even less well than others who have succumbed to this arduous mimetic fallacy. In translating *The Comedy* Mary Prentice Lillie follows Dante in another way, by employing his hendecasyllabics, an experiment with no obvious boobytrap; however, her translation, without being egregiously bad, is no better than a dozen others in a variety of meters, because of her ear. Louis Biancolli's version, in a

[2] "Getting to Dante," THE HUDSON REVIEW, Vol. XI No. 4 (Winter, 1958-59).

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stave so blank as to seem free, without being free, is no worse than some other blank verse translations this side of Longfellow's.

The Biancolli translation is "daringly" illustrated and costs $20.00. The Lillie translation is sumptuously printed in a limited edition and no price is quoted. Neither version includes the notes without which only a Dantist can read Dante. I think of Yeats's lines:

> And all their eyes still fixed, hoping to find once more,
> Being by Calvary's turbulence unsatisfied,
> The uncontrollable mystery on the bestial floor.

I could understand *The Faërie Queene*'s becoming a favorite selection for never-to-be-read luxury editions; it is long, it is pretty even when you are not understanding it, it provides endless opportunities for illustrating, no one expects you to read it all. But to get a gift edition of *The Divine Comedy*, that hard dream ranging from the highest exaltation to utter cold, that unluxurious and least comfortable of poems. . . . I would as soon get a plastic replica of Yggdrasil for Christmas, the tree that used to hold heaven and earth together, or a Tibetan prayer-wheel with $E = mc^2$ instead of the prayer on all the pretty little flutters of papers. Why can't they just leave it alone? Why do they want to look at it without knowing it?

Notes on Contributors

RONALD PERRY is a Miami-born poet, now living in Nassau, Bahamas. He spent two years, 1957-58, in Laos working for an engineering company. He has published other translations from the Lao in THE HUDSON REVIEW (Autumn, 1959 and Spring, 1960). These versions and the "Sin Xai" will be a part of his next book, *The City of the Sandalwood Fortress.*

BERT O. STATES* teaches in the Department of Speech and Theatre Arts at the University of Pittsburgh. He is working on a study of structural principles in the drama since Chekhov.

DENNIS SCHMITZ is now living in Sacramento.

DAVID WAGONER's newest book, *Staying Alive,* is reviewed in this issue.

ROBERT HASS* is a young poet who lives in Palo Alto; his poems in this issue are his first to be published anywhere.

TRIM BISSELL* teaches Creative Writing at Wayne State University.

Extended, a book of poems by DOROTHY ROBERTS, is soon to be published by the University of New Brunswick, Canada.

ANTHONY BURGESS' most recent book is *A Shorter Finnegans Wake.*

HAYDEN CARRUTH's next contribution to this Review will be an essay on Robert Lowell.

SIDNEY MONAS is currently teaching in the Department of Russian Studies of The Hebrew University, Jerusalem.

Asterisk indicates a new contributor.

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ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS

Choice Litters

". . . AND, BESIDES, WHAT WE NEED MOST, and have needed any time these past forty years, is a proper text of *Ulysses*. The biography, the correspondence, the criticism, none of it would be of the least public interest, if it weren't for the great novel—which we allow to subsist, year after year, in a literally shameful state. Thousands of errors disfigure the text—some trivial, some important, many reducing it to a momentary state of absolute unintelligibility, all correctible. Yet every time it's reprinted (amid deep-voiced assurances from publishers that their latest achievement is "definitive" or "carefully corrected and much improved" or whatever), the price of two corrections turns out to be twenty additional misprints. Random House holds the American copyright, it's going to run out in a few years, when absolutely anybody will be free to reprint as sloppy a version as he wants; so let's get going on a halfway adequate edition of the big book soon, now. . . ."

Which things having been said, two new volumes of Joyce's correspondence come up for consideration.[1] These two volumes supplement (and in a chronological sense, overlie) that edited ten years ago by Mr. Stuart Gilbert; they cover (as did Gilbert's volume) the full range of Joyce's career, but reproduce none of the letters already printed in Gilbert, only new ones. We have thus an improvised and a-bit-less-than-ideal arrangement, with Gilbert's preliminary collection constituting Vol. I, and Ellmann's two outsize supplements constituting Vols. II and III of the three-volume set (with indexes in Vols. I and III). Sometimes this arrangement scatters through different volumes letters which were written on the same day or as part of a single correspondence. Questions are thus divided from answers, Tuesday's note may be 500 pages away from Thursday's response. No great matter; the present arrangement can be lived with, though it certainly would have been more convenient if Mr. Ellmann had inserted here and there a footnote reference to closely associated letters in Mr. Gilbert's collection. But the financial problems of incorporating Gilbert's old letters with Ellman's new materials can only compel our sympathy for the publishers. So here at any rate is the corpus of Joyce's correspondence—in all, something like 1400 pages of letters—which, with the necessary biographical summaries, annotations, translations, and explanations, makes roughly as much material as is contained in *Ulysses* and *Finnegans Wake* combined.

Of this new material, some is beyond any question of prime literary importance; and most of this, I think, will be found in the first of Mr.

[1] LETTERS OF JAMES JOYCE (Vols. II and III), edited by *Richard Ellmann*. The Viking Press. Vols. II and III, $25; three volumes boxed, $35.

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Ellmann's volumes, Volume II of the set, covering the years 1902-1920. These are the years which Stuart Gilbert represented, on the whole, very meagerly, with only 100 pages of letters out of 425. Readers of that first volume must have had rather frequently the sense that they were presented with all too generous a sample of the plaintive and querulous Joyce, the burdened paterfamilias, the incompetent businessman, the pseudo-impresario, and the rather wooden public figure —all roles into which the later Joyce tended to harden. For the biographer, these are facets quite as interesting and revelatory as any other; but literary minds are more apt to be interested in the literary consciousness which forged the great fiction. This literary consciousness, this bundle of violent sensitivities which underlay the glittering carapace of a polished, impersonal style, can be seen and studied in the new volumes. One has a little the sensation of a Peeping Tom in studying it, for Joyce revealed this aspect of himself chiefly to his brother Stanislaus and to his wife Nora. But Mr. Ellmann is, by now, practically a member of the family; and he has had the good taste in any event to censor out some irrelevant personal details, along with the most violent expressions of Joyce's domestic pornography. The result is a record of developing artistic consciousness possessing a vital interest quite unparalleled outside the correspondence of Flaubert.

On the technical level, it should be said at once that the new volumes are an editorial triumph. The materials in them pose complicated problems which have been unobtrusively but thoroughly solved. For example, a comparison of Mr. Ellmann's volumes with the one edited by Mr. Gilbert reveals in the second collection a far more detailed and consistent principle of annotation. Partly this derives from Mr. Ellmann's own work on the biography and the generally more sophisticated stage of Joyce studies at this time; but it also suggests a more professional conception of editorial work. It's a real pleasure to feel confident that the unexpected name, the complex allusion, and the intricate circumstance will, more than likely, be explained in a timely footnote. Of these explanations, most are sufficient and some are brilliant. Over a long span, the best editor is bound to slip here and there, but the few instances where this reviewer noted errors or oversights were altogether venial; generally, the work seems done to admiration.

Assuming the collection is now more or less complete, what does it show? In the first place, that Joyce's mind in those early days operated at a high literary tension; it slipped rapidly from role to role, finding immense resources of performance in the developing occasions of existence. One has the sense, sometimes, of multiple Joyce personalities riding about on his shoulders and stooping by turns to occupy the cage of his consciousness. There is a faint, languishing, lover-like Joyce, who wrote those perishing epistles to Martha Fleisch-

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mann, or who dreamed of being spanked like a bad little boy by Nora Barnacle. And then abruptly he converts into a foul-mouthed, rocky-minded egotist who sacrificed with brutal, even cheerful, indifference the feelings of his family and friends, while proclaiming himself an Overman. Few authors have had so strongly *counterpointed* a personality; few run such a gamut of attitudes. When he is lofty, his disdain is monumental, yet he has an equal appetite for squalor and vulgarity; he is the most rabid of village atheists and the most superstitious of Catholics, an ardent Irishman and a loather of Ireland, he sees woman as a madonna and a *saccum stercoris*. Now he swoons into prose of embarrassing lushness, now strikes out with a stripped statement like a knife-blade.

There is, of course, a major inaccuracy compounded in the very image of an "extreme" Joyce formed by the correspondence—detailed and authentic as it certainly is. Joyce's "deeper" correspondence, the letters of self-analysis and self-exploration, were addressed very largely to Nora and Stanislaus. And this correspondence clusters quite naturally around the periods when Joyce for one reason or another was out of town or out of touch with his two chief spiritual aides; it is therefore weighted heavily in the direction of crisis and disaster. The awful period in 1906-07 when Joyce tried to support himself by working in a Roman bank is heavily documented; so is the nightmare of his first visit to Ireland in 1909. By contrast, the two years from mid-1907 to mid-1909 are the most sparsely represented period of Joyce's life. The correspondence is particularly rich in exasperated hagglings over the publication of *Dubliners*, since most of these negotiations were conducted by post or described in detailed letters from Dublin to Trieste. But there is relatively little, for perfectly obvious reasons, of the routine tenor of Joyce's life as it must have flowed along for considerable periods in Trieste. "Happy families are all alike," says Tolstoy; I don't suppose Joyce's was ever all that happy, but the uneventful, creative, "bourgeois" periods of his existence are unavoidably—perhaps fortunately—little represented in his correspondence. Stanislaus, in an interesting note to Herbert Gorman (8 August 1931), points out the seminal importance in his brother's intellectual life of the years 1912-14; yet this is another of the meager periods in the record written by the letters.

It follows that reading the correspondence is unlikely to help one with reading the fiction as much as one would expect, given the autobiographical substructure beneath most of that fiction. The big relationships have already been marked out in the criticism and biography, and the little ones aren't very often illuminated by the material which drops casually from Joyce's pen. What the letters do provide is not so much help with exegesis as an awareness of the hidden energies which lay, genetically, beneath the fiction, controlling its emphases and suggesting its outlines. From this point of view,

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reading through the letters is like reading a substitute and very corny novel, almost a fairy-tale. In this fable, Virtue, long oppressed and misunderstood, at last gains recognition, but finds that success turns to ashes in its mouth. Children's literature and 19th-century melodrama are at the root of this pseudo-fiction. Its "heavies" are Gogarty, the British Empire, and the complacent Georgian literary establishment (represented by the reader for Duckworth & Co.). Its pathetic but authentic supporting cast includes loyal-resentful Stanislaus (before *Finnegans Wake),* patient Nora, timely Ezra Pound, and the children. Its protagonist is The Artist with his single-minded devotion to The Truth, Wherever It May Lead. Miss Harriet Weaver is Fairy Godmother.

To suggest that Joyce's life followed the pattern of a melodramatic fairy-tale is not to dismiss the edition of his correspondence as without value; it is to emphasize the fantastic gap between the raw materials as originally given/created and the same materials as transposed and sophisticated by the author's literary imagination. Joyce cannibalized his life in order to create his writings; it was a quality of his mind to act out with some crudeness dramas which his creative literary mind would render with far greater subtlety, more delicate shadings, and with more moving restraint, in the books themselves. And so we return, as always, to the novels, which have not yet been properly read, let alone appreciated. The letters make three really splendid volumes, and I'm quite ashamed to set them on the shelf beside my Modern-Library-Giant *Ulysses,* which still sits there with all its blotches and imperfections upon it.

To Our Readers:

The following books by editors of THE HUDSON REVIEW have recently been published. In accordance with our policy, they will not be reviewed in these pages, but are listed here for the interest of our readers:

ROBERT MARTIN ADAMS: *Nil: Episodes in the Literary Conquest of Void During the Nineteenth Century.* Oxford University Press. $6.00. *Surface and Symbol: The Consistency of James Joyce's Ulysses.* Oxford University Press. (First paperback edition.) $1.85. *James Joyce: Common Sense and Beyond.* Random House. $1.95.

MARIUS BEWLEY (ed.): *The Selected Poetry of John Donne* (with an introduction by Marius Bewley). Signet Classic. New American Library. $.95.

ANTHONY HECHT (ed., with John Hollander): *Jiggery-Pokery: A Compendium of Double Dactyls.* Atheneum. $3.95.

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VERNON YOUNG

Somewhat Less than a World

STANLEY KAUFFMANN'S COLLECTION OF REVIEWS from *The New Republic* (1958-1966) meets the title half-way;[1] one hemisphere is rather more palpable than the other. Like James Agee in one respect, Kauffmann is fearless and funny on native ground, especially when reporting what *doesn't* amuse him. Faced with the European (or Asiatic) cinema he is distinctly nervous—with exceptions to be noted. Agee simply went to pieces on those rare occasions he was called upon to review foreign movies. Kauffmann handles the ordeal with greater ease—in the case of Antonioni with distinction—yet it would be deducible, if other knowledge were lacking, that the author of these criticisms, at home or abroad, is an impenitent native of Manhattan; his flavor is most piquant when sauced with the suspicion that someone is trying to put something over on him. He has the New Yorker's elasticity, the shrewd, rapidly adjustable talent for sizing up, seeing through and knocking down. As a skeptical, if eager, witness to what was going on in the world of *American* film (and theatre) during the eight years of his weekly involvement, Kauffmann is more reliable than anyone writing in the same period.

Kauffmann appears to have approached the cinema with assumptions cultivated by theatre, if not, indeed, by the law court. He is strong on matters of adaptation and construction, he is acutely aware of actors, he is tied to logical social inferences, he has always read the morning paper. He argues points like a lawyer, often with some assurance that if he talks fast and idiomatically his elisions will escape notice and his summations will not be too delicately examined. Enviably confident of his readers' orientation, he writes a colloquial and allusive prose, ideally suited to weekly assimilation by readers of a politically-minded magazine, with a degree of pertinence that with happy frequency outlasts the hour of compliment or derision. Kauffmann takes a combative interest in the people who make the movies, the theatre and the publicity thereof in America; he is familiar with their past performances, their entangling alliances, their smokescreens and with the expense accounts of their press agents. In short, he is better equipped than most American film critics, who are either too unexercised, too venal or too academic, to spot false credentials and occupational fatigue: hence, his usefulness as a guide through the labyrinth of perennial expectations and invariable catastrophe known as the American film.

[*The Greatest Story Ever Told*] The film runs (if that is the word) four hours, plus intermission, and in the large cast are many

[1] A WORLD ON FILM, by *Stanley Kauffmann*. Harper & Row. $7.95.

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actors, some of whom play very small parts. This leads to a sport we may call "actor-spotting"—recognizing the actor or actress who may be speeding past in wig and costume with only a few lines. There is nothing wrong with this sport except that particularly for the small quick roles, producers ought to pick actors without the letter "s" in their names. When John the Baptist first appears, "Charlton Heston" gets whispered all through the theatre; or in smaller parts, it's "Sal Mineo" or "Shelley Winters" or "Donald Pleasance." The effect is like a thousand simultaneous gas leaks. I prefer the effect when John Wayne walks through, as a centurion, and the audience murmurs his name—without an "s"—a large moan, like a dinosaur giving birth.

[*The Birds*] In the commercial film world that lives by stroking the public and making it pay as it purrs, a man who gibes even mildly at Home and Mother seems a very daring fellow indeed. Hitchcock's films have dallied rather than dealt with political affairs, social relations, psychological problems. His reputation for bitter realism depends less on candor and penetration than on clever technique, novelty of settings, and an emotionally cool style. Nothing is more clinical than a Hitchcock sex scene, for all the ear nibbling; nothing is less exciting than his camera's eye in detailing threat or murder.

[*The Trial*] . . . he [Orson Welles] has no view of life that he wants deeply to state, no vision to convey, no relation with his world of which his films are an expression. He is a scene and sequence maker, not a film-maker.

[*The Connection*] Gelber thinks his work is largely done when he has assembled the surface details—the taboo language, the bursting boil, the vomit, the nose-picking. If this really is the nature of truth and if none of it must be withheld, why do he and Miss Clarke chicken out of taking us into the toilet that these characters visit?

Sweet Bird and his last film *Suddenly One Summer* were both highly successful, in my view, because Williams' name has become a trade mark of sweaty sexuality wrapped in perfumed poesy. There is enough art about the efforts to assure the pop-eyed playgoer that he is not a mere sensation seeker; how could he be happier? . . . Sidney Lumet, the director, is usually at least clever at least part of the time—an acquisitive magpie who has picked up, along with tinselly trash, a few small gems. This time he brings us nothing but bits of colored glass.

I have quoted exclusively disparaging samples because Kauffmann shines as a prosecutor. Certainly the American film, by and large, deserves no more charitable treatment. Farther afield and at higher altitudes, Kauffmann is quite as intrepid. He has managed to resist the widely entertained view of Andrzej Wajda as a genius rather than as a reasonably vivid film-maker; he has not been intimidated by the

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apostles of Godard or of Robbe-Grillet; he has refused to take on trust the Britisher's conviction that his recent Angry movies constitute Art or that if they don't it's no matter because Art must go the way of the Old School Tie. So much common sense and independent judgment, so much resistance to Times Square or *Cahiers du Cinema* propaganda, so much "wised-up" New Yorker determination not to be hustled by a foreign label or esotoric effusions is not without hazards. When confronted with films that will not yield their essence to reason unaided or those which cannot be fairly dismissed by application of the pragmatic test, Kauffmann is at a loss. Not consistently, I hasten to add. He pays his respects with intelligence and warmth to many single films from France, Italy, Bengal or Japan when their content resembles the negotiable issues of the world he knows. Reaching the limits of personal identification, however, he falters, translates his failure of sympathy into a form of disapproval he expects his readers to share, blusters if he senses that he is losing ground and, in the ensuing panic, misreports what precisely takes place in the film he is discussing. My explanation of the predicatment may not be entirely accurate; that the predicament exists—too often for our confidence to be sustained—may be confirmed by noting the number of times Kauffmann's false reading of a film is derived from or excused by a fallacious description of its details.

A minor example of this tendency is his grudging notice of a brief sequence he enjoyed in Truffaut's *The Soft Skin*, "a night scene in which, after she [the stewardness, Françoise Dorléac] has telephoned agreeing to meet him [the publisher, Jean Desailly] next day, he walks around his hotel suite with an unchanged face, unconsciously turning on all the lights." Kauffmann missed the point completely. Desailly, in preparation for the expected rendezvous, has turned off all but one strategically placed lamp. When Françoise phones to defer their meeting to the following day, his staged décor is rendered superfluous; shrugging resignedly as he prepares to go to bed alone, he automatically flips the lights back on again. If Kauffmann misconstrued much more of the film in this way, it's not surprising he pronounced it a "failure"! To report incorrectly a passing nuance is pardonable; Kauffmann's deprecations too often extend to the enveloping style of a film. In *Sundays and Cybèle* the pastoral scenes are in his opinion "done with some self-consciousness about their lyric quality." To be sure, these scenes, filmed in Corot's Ville d'Avray landscape, establish the necessary idyllic atmosphere in which Kruger's increasingly sinister relationship with the twelve-year-old girl takes place: why is this "self-conscious" rather than appropriate? "Bourgignon also shows a weakness for shooting scenes through shutters and key-holes and in rear-view mirrors of moving cars, all for no intrinsic reason." On the contrary, Bourgignon's film announces with its preliminary outburst (Kruger in a plane, on a strafing mission, plummeting groundward toward a small girl frozen with fear) the theme of

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traumatic vertigo and an accompanying dislocation of Kruger's perspectives. Since the shots named by Kauffmann principally involve Kruger's point of view, they cannot be considered extrinsic.

In a like manner Kauffmann is peculiarly ambivalent towards the work of Truffaut as a whole. Clearly, he would like to acknowledge Truffaut's creative audacity and more than once does so in a general statement, yet with nearly every particular of the films under survey he discredits it. His review of *The 400 Blows* (surely we agree that here is one of the supreme films of a generation?) is beyond any allowances, from me at least, that opinions differ; they differ significantly only if the critic's judgments are self-evident or his analysis revealing. I think there is not one among a thousand sensitive filmgoers who will agree with Kauffmann that this film is merely "technically accomplished, in a slavishly veristic tone" or that the boy, Jean-Pierre Léaud, was "well-schooled but stolid." Kauffmann's fumbling of the now-famous ending is surely one of the most obtuse comments ever expressed on a great moment in the cinema. "The baffled boy's face simply freezes into a still photo; is it a symbol of paralysis or does it predict a news story about a suicide?" Nor is he any more resilient on the subject of *Jules and Jim,* for he deplores precisely what gives the film its personality, its cultural texture and its nostalgic substance: sequences *seemingly unrelated* if you hold the strict view that a film narrative should contain only elements and episodes necessary to its "plot." The very life of Truffaut's film is constructed out of gratuitous presences—moments of empathy, of stony silence, of diverted hostility, of motiveless clowning. The flux of life itself over the years is composed from the slight as well as from the actively significant passages and in this film the cavalcade of events, personal and international, is given a larking style from Truffaut's guileful editing and his canny decision of how much improvisation his structure can afford. Kauffmann's troubled reception is the more mysterious for his having, a year before, acclaimed Antonioni for a comparable revolution. "He attempts to get from film the same utility of the medium itself as a novelist whose point is not a story but mood and character and for whom the texture of the prose is as relevant as what he says in the prose." What else, in his own way, was Truffaut doing? And I must say that there's something churlish in the Postscript which Kauffmann added before book publication, in which he sets up the most frivolous opinions about *Jules and Jim,* current in New York at that time, to justify his personally negative commitment. I am not questioning Kauffmann's privilege to withhold complete praise or even to remain bored; I feel that in this case he has argued strenuously without ever perceiving that the grounds of his argument beg an elusive question. He has criticised Truffaut's style on the identical principles employed to praise Antonioni. The disparity is of course a consequence of temperamental preference. Without preferences a critic would be a monster. But I believe he is

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obliged to understand when he is concealing his preferences behind an assumption of objectivity.

In this direction, I am seriously disappointed to discover (I had not read his review before) that Kauffmann was not only unable to find any poetic merit in *Viridiana* but also that he was willing to rest with the stock interpretation of Bunuel's film: that taken chronologically it pictures, *approvingly,* the triumph of pragmatic liberalism. At any rate, that seems to be the drift of his very odd conclusions. "God *is* mocked—by men who are essentially animals. The only help for the animal is not metaphysical but worldly action." (What, by the way, would *metaphysical action* be?) I don't understand how he arrives at such an inference, since a close and unbiased view of the film will reveal that the "progressive" nephew is no less venal and spiritually dense—if less cruel, to be sure—than anyone else in the film; his "worldly action" consists in buying off and patching up (*and incidentally in replacing baroque music with swing!*). Customarily, Kauffmann is not snared by fashionable interpretations, yet he seems in this review to have fallen foul of the doctrinal (i.e. anti-clerical) argument which hopefully identifies Bunuel's sympathy with that of the rabble who break up the estate and rape the Church. I repeat what I elaborated previously in these pages—perhaps not explicitly enough—that *Viridiana* is a fable of the successive stages by which modern man has entered a long dark night. (Which doesn't hinder it from being at the same time a story of the rise and fall of a misguided novice named Viridiana!) With many of Kauffmann's censures (Bunuel-in-search-of-pain) I would agree; nonetheless, when Bunuel makes a film where his double-edged intention is consistently exposed in every metre, I should think that Kauffmann would be able to sense the moral difference and above all to delight in the pungent and indelibly Flamencan style that gives this work its terrifying yet seductive character. No, he will have none of it, and in his sweeping rejections he recklessly includes "a shot of a cat leaping on a mouse when the son grabs the maid" among the "facile ironic symbols." If there was a mouse in that scene, I'm going blind betimes. As I recall the moment, the *nephew* (he is not the aristocrat's son) is holding the cat in his arms; when he notes the flush of desire lighting up the maid's face, he tosses the cat aside. The camera simply follows the movement of the cat for the quick fadeout instead of remaining—thank God—with the embrace which we know full well ensues.

From Kauffmann's niggardly handling of *Viridiana* it is regrettably clear that when he disapproves of the social context or the moral stripe of a film story he is likely to hasten, no doubt unconsciously, to attack the *method* of the director before considering what point of view the director holds towards his material. When his foremost prejudices are awakened he goes far beyond the scope of the film itself in order to belittle: egregiously, with Bernhard Wicki's film about the

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unnecessary slaughter of a group of German boys, *The Bridge*. First Kauffmann tells us that the film is virtually a masterpiece. "In its lucid impartial insistence and insight, the film achieves the status of art." Following this superlative, he destroys the foundation for its having any merit at all by initiating a paragraph on Germany's war crimes with the irrelevant qualification, "Well, the senselessness is plain enough. The question is, whose fault was it?" Kauffmann has just raised "the question" himself. It is *not* a question in the film. Wicki makes no attempt to evade German responsibility; the point is not at issue and if he doesn't introduce it that's surely because it's well-known to begin with and in any case is not the subject of *The Bridge,* which simply recounts one factual and horribly wasteful incident of the international debacle. Kauffmann's attitude here is an all-too-familiar one: if German film-makers don't make films that confess their fathers' crimes, they are escaping from Truth; if they make such films they're too late doing so and in any case the films will never be condemnatory enough. The attitude is outrageous, since it rejects in advance any film made on a touchy subject in Germany. Kauffmann might as well have announced at the head of his column —"Even if a German film is good I refuse, without reservations, to admire it."

Challenged by the best films of Ingmar Bergman, Kauffmann is muddled as well as hostile. Some critics have been known to admit they were confused—by Bergman or another—but Kauffmann unsportingly insists that Bergman's art, not his own sensibility, is before the bar. He introduces *The Magician* condescendingly: "It is now clear that we must resign ourselves to the present state of Ingmar Bergman's virtues." No, we must not. We have no obligation whatever to resign ourselves to *anyone's* virtues if we consider them synonymous with limitations. We can define them as such and turn elsewhere. Kauffmann was not resigned; in fact, he was anxious to expose the virtues as vices. After doggedly refusing in the first place to engage this film on the multiple levels required, he sneered thereafter at what he considered to be its obscurity. By the time he came to write his Postscript hints had reached him of what should have been recognizable to him earlier (it was immediately visible to Fellini, by the way): the story of *The Magician* is a parable of the artist's misinterpretation by other people and of his consequent mistrust of his own talent. (A rough gloss but 'twill serve!) Kauffmann was obviously loth to accept this interpretation and feebly maintained that "The allegory view alters the locus of criticisms, it does not answer them." Properly speaking, he had established no locus in his original review; he had only contended that the film was unsatisfactorily mystifying. Of course it was, *for him,* since he had found no clue to its coherence! Yet taking the film simply at its face value, I fail to see why he should have found it nonsensical and worked so hard to bring it into the realm of the insupportable. Not a line, a scene or a character deviates from the

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ironically tempered fable which Bergman reconstructed on the basis of a morality-play by Gilbert Chesterton (*Magic,* 1912): the self-searching of a mountebank baited by a household of philistines. Kauffmann archly assumes the pose of an injured empiricist:

> When the mesmerist is tempted by his hostess, why does he beat himself like a Dostoievskan saint being swayed from his holy course if, as we learn later, he is only a cheap vaudevillian grovelling for tips? [For shame! is *that* what we learn?] And, if he *is* a fake, why is his grandmother shown to have genuine witchlike powers?

If it comes to that, how can one take seriously Macbeth's conviction that he is to become Thane of Cawdor if the witches, who prophesied, don't exist? Patently, Kauffmann thinks *we* think he's funny. Such desperation is not even ethical.

The Virgin Spring provokes him even more. In his review of *The Greatest Story* he was willing to joke about his aversion to the Christian tradition, since he was dealing with *kitsch;* Bergman's film is nearer the dark source and this so repels him that even his observation is impaired. Again he leads with a left jab to the head. "A failure by Ingmar Bergman is always welcome." Four paragraphs later he is assuring you that "the sense of medieval life is excellently maintained. For a split second or two, you can find a portion of your mind asking: 'How in the world could a camera have been present?' " How in the world, then, can a film displaying such authenticity be regarded as a failure? Reread the statement closely; you realize what faint praise has actually been conveyed—"a split second or two," and "a portion of your mind." And the retraction follows: ". . . the bulk of the film is a religious-moral charade. It is like looking at a series of scenes of a large medieval tapestry," [name *one* such medieval tapestry, Mr. Kauffmann!] "and all of it (except for the moments of sex and blood) rarefied and abstract. . . ." The smoke rising from the chimney as the cock crows, the bellows-blown fire to bake the betraying bread, the mute boy sitting beside the corpse after the rape and murder, as the snow silently falls, the same boy vomiting on the table and his brother scooping up the mess apologetically with his bare hands, numerous notations of the weather and the time of day and the nocturnal forest sounds, the father cutting three branches from the birch tree to thrash himself in the purifying sauna: these and a host of country details, *rarefied and abstract?* Failing all else, Kauffmann grossly misrepresents the vengeance scene, to my mind one of the perfect examples of graduated dramatic intensity in all cinema. Kauffmann describes it as pandemonium, complains that it is altogether too protracted and ridicules its plausibility on the grounds that the father and mother get in each other's way during the killing! This will never do. Husband and wife are *not in the stuga* at the same time until the killing is done! I suggest that Mr. Kauffmann and anyone who has been persuaded by him review the entire sequence, *counting the cuts*

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(i.e. the shot-sequences) from the time that Von Sydow enters the house (*alone*) to the moment when he kills the boy by hurling him against the wall. I would then invite anyone to replot the continuity with stricter economy, retaining of course the masterful crescendo from premonitory stillness while dawn filters into the house and the sleepers awake to the end of the actually brief but murderous assault.

Frankly, my appeal is a mere net to catch wind. While others might believe the evidence of their eyes, I doubt that Kauffmann himself cares whether or not he reported the sequence accurately. His querulous attack was a device intended to ratify the plain fact that his metropolitan soul is bored by nature in the raw and irritated by religious sanctions or indeed by any goings-on that demand our attentive consent to a dimension not accessible to mundane inquiry. This is equally evident in his sweeping dismissal of *La Dolce Vita*. The Fellini film is a flawed epic, to be sure, and fairly screams for critical knuckle-rapping. But the effort made by Kauffmann to pronounce it a total loss suggests a resentment of aspects which he never explicitly engages in his review. If anyone remains interested, after five years, in doing substantial justice to that ambitious souvenir of baroque film-making, he might well re-read Kauffmann's disclaimer with his eyes, unlike those of Justice, unbandaged. I have no space to recapitulate it here and I don't want to give the impression that I have exhaustively scrutinized *A World on Film* looking for opinions to combat. If Kauffmann had been less influential a voice I would settle for his merits, which are incontestable, and go my own way without retort. If, however, there are many readers like Eric Bentley who (according to the jacket) have read Kauffmann's reviews "religiously" (an adverb which must have discomfited our author!), they might well be amenable to alternative readings—or *seeings*—of some of the most rewarding films of the last decade. Kauffmann was so intelligent when vigilant, it's a pity he didn't pay closer attention more of the time. The Antonioni reviews he wrote in 1961 and 1962 are reassuring, if disconcerting, evidence that nobody could write more generously and more perceptively when for intimate reasons, perhaps, he was wrung by recognition. His examination of *La Notte,* especially, declares astutely what the film is all about and, embracing that, what the film art of Antonioni then signified:

> He [Antonioni] is reshaping the idea of the content of film drama. . . . He is reshaping time itself in his films, taking it out of its customary synoptic form, wringing intensity out of its distention, daring to ask us to "live through" experiences with less distillation, deriving his drama from the very texture of such experiences and their juxtaposition, rather than from formal clash and climax and resolution.

This is one world on film which I think no critic has more responsively explored.

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PATRICK CRUTTWELL

Fiction Chronicle

YOUR FICTION CHRONICLER IN LAST AUTUMN'S issue began by observing that "some things are not worth understanding," and added that the essential job of the critic is to decide whether or not "the book at hand is or is not worth discussing at all." I agree with Mr. Morse: but what do you do if most of the straw from which you are to make your house of bricks turns out to be of the latter sort—the sort that is *not* worth working at? And such is the case, I fear, with most of what I received this time. A dismal bunch, to be honest, the saddest I have had. Is it perhaps my fault? Am I suffering from that common affliction, reviewer's nausea, sometimes called Mallarmé's Syndrome—*la chair est triste, hélas, et j'ai lu tous les livres?* I think not: for I found myself responding with no lack of appreciation—with much relief and gratitude, in fact—to those few among the many which did seem to me "worth understanding." As for the others—all one can do is either to say nothing (which is best) or to draw from the nature of their failures whatever morals one can.

That sounds, I must admit, intolerably priggish; what I have to say next will sound even more so. It does seem to me that what is wrong with very large areas of contemporary literature is a lack of simple *humility*. The demands which the modern writer is capable of making for his work—and therefore for himself—can be truly enormous, preposterous. They are based on the assumption that his writings ought to be for everyone, as they are for himself, the centre of the universe: an assumption which is questionable even if one is a supreme genius, ridiculous if one is not. Look at the letters of Joyce, Dylan Thomas, and Malcolm Lowry: this is what is common to all of them, this mad devouring egotism, which sacrifices first the writer himself, then all others unlucky enough to be involved with him, on the altar of the sacred Work. And the work itself, however great the genius, must be spoiled by it, and is; if the source is poisoned, some of the poison must enter the stream.

I suppose the ultimate start of this lay somewhere in romanticism, in that inflating of the writer into prophet and almost redeemer, of which Shelley's *Defence of Poetry* is a perfect specimen. It has meant a continual straining to be bigger, a striving to be *more*—more than one's individual talent, or the nature of the work, could reasonably allow. It means that the motto of the modern writer is always more likely to be Browning's

> A man's reach should exceed his grasp,
> Or what's a heaven for?

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than Pope's

> Each might his several province well command,
> Would all but stoop to what they understand.

Note, please, that Pope is not recommending—and neither am I—a craven absence of ambitiousness. "Well command" implies the opposite—the effort to reach the limit, achieve the utmost, but within the range which self-knowledge—and that is humility—has laid down. If, then, literature as a whole is encouraged to aim at targets it cannot reach, and if the most revered and celebrated set examples of megalomaniac hysteria, one can hardly be surprised if the effects are perceptible on lower and less publicized levels. There was a case of it, as I thought, in Oakley Hall's *The Pleasure Garden*.[1] This could have been a quite interesting, reasonably convincing novel about a group of people involved in running a Californian ski-resort and the effects on them all of the death (accident or design?) of the man who had pioneered it; but the whole thing was hopelessly flawed by the author's determination to make it a vehicle for philosophizing: and the philosophizing—which the book takes with great seriousness—is of an unbelievable phoniness and naiveté. It is all too clear that this "province" is not one that this writer can "well command."

Another phenomenon I notice, and another fertile cause of failures, is the virtual disappearance, from the levels where serious or would-be serious criticism operates, of the Common Reader: the anonymous, uncommitted individual who reads for himself and makes up his mind for himself. His disappearance has been often enough, of course, lamented by critics: I sometimes suspect that we critics ourselves are much to blame for it, we have so bullied and bulldozed the poor fellow that he has simply given up in despair and retreated to the television set or the drugstore paperbacks. Or (what is worse) he dutifully pretends to a taste which he does not genuinely have. Perhaps there is just one field of literature left in which the Common Reader still dominates, is still the arbiter of taste. And that is in books for children. You can't fool a child into imagining he is interested when in fact he is bored, or impressed when he is really irritated; no more can you intimidate him into pretending he does not like what in truth he does. You may feel he should *not* like Struwwelpeter or the Cat in the Hat: but he does, and he will not pretend otherwise. You may feel he *should* like Eliot's hard-working poems about cats: but he does not like them, and you cannot make him. He has an instinct, that tells him which works were genuinely *made for him*—made, that is, by men capable of comprehending and recreating in themselves the responses of a child—and which were made by men who just thought it would be fun, or kindly, or profitable, one day to write a "book for children." This instinct is perhaps the child's equivalent of that spontaneous response—for or against, I like it or I don't, I'm interested

[1] THE PLEASURE GARDEN, by *Oakley Hall*. Viking Press. $6.50.

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or I'm bored—which ought to be the basis, the only honest basis, of all criticism, but which is really very hard to stick to when one is professionally involved in the business . . .

Back to my muttons. The disappearance of the Common Reader, or his pathetic obsequiousness, has these consequences. First, once a Reputation has been made, once a Name has been established, it would seem that there is thereafter *no* limit to the worthlessness of what that Name and Reputation can go on producing. Of which the latest Kerouac is a shattering specimen. *Satori in Paris*[2] is its title; it purports to record its author's "mystical experience" in that city, and you wouldn't believe the sheer pointless inanity of it. It exists in print—this is very clear—because, and only because, of its author's name on the title page: and of how many other books does one have to say that! Clearly commercialism is involved here. There is Big Money, I suppose, invested in a Kerouac, bigger still in a Mailer, and the assembly-line must be kept moving, the publicity kept blaring, if the shareholders are to be happy. But it's fatuous to blame "commercialism" in itself; commercialism is just an abstraction. The real cause is the dazed subservience of the customers. And we the critics—who should be their watchdogs, the Consumers' Union of literature—do we always do our job?

And another consequence is the disappearance, as an intellectually respectable reason for reading, of simple pleasure; and also, as an intellectually respectable reason for ceasing to read, of simple boredom. For if these reasons were still accepted, isn't there an immense proportion of the much-admired which would sink without trace—or be forced to reform itself? I am thinking now of two novels I have here by leaders of the European *avant-garde:* Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Maison de Rendez-vous*[3] and Uwe Johnson's *Two Views.*[4] The former is, in a way, "about" a murder in a high-class brothel purporting to be in Hong-Kong; the latter concerns itself with two lovers (if that is the word: but it isn't, they are such bloodless wraiths) in West and East Berlin respectively. I find it almost impossible to believe that anyone could read these with spontaneous pleasure and not with spontaneous tedium; they seem, indeed, perversely to *challenge* one to be bored if one dares to be so philistine—a challenge which I am willing (or forced) to accept. Robbe-Grillet's book follows his usual technique of slow, meticulous descriptions of the external appearances of objects or actions, accompanied by an elaborate parade of alternative explanations of phenomena—and these descriptions and explanations, in some way beyond my comprehension, are supposed to be invested with tremendous significances. The real trouble, I suspect, is a simple *confusion des genres,* twentieth-century variant: methods appropriate to the sciences and to film-making are transferred to the entirely unsuited medium of words and fiction. Robbe-Grillet has been

[2] SATORI IN PARIS, by *Jack Kerouac.* Grove Press. $3.95.
[3] LA MAISON DE RENDEZ-VOUS, by *Alain Robbe-Grillet.* Grove Press. $4.50.
[4] TWO VIEWS, by *Uwe Johnson.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.50.

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a scientist (the jacket shows him looking through a magnifying-glass with a sternly impersonal scientist's scrutiny), and he does of course make films; but what succeeded, no doubt, for the agronomist, and succeeds for the maker of *Marienbad,* does not succeed here. As for *Two Views,* it is written in a prose of deliberate flatness, and its two "views," (they aren't characters, as I suppose the title is telling us) are disembodied in every possible sense. The book is intending, I think, to say something about the Wall, about the division of Europe and the world; but no emotion about it comes through. If the author does care, he has very successfully hidden it from me.

I did not find pleasure in these two; I did find tedium. Here are two in which I did find pleasure, and did not find tedium: Elizabeth Enright's *Doublefields*[5] and Anne Bernays' *Prudence, Indeed.*[6] Miss Enright's book is a collection of autobiographical sketches, short stories, and one novella (the title story). This last has a Jamesian theme—*Spoils of Poynton,* or Osmond in *Portrait of a Lady*—that of a man in whom a passion for beautiful objects usurps and destroys any feeling for people—and I thought it moving and truthful, within the limits of depth which it sets itself. *Prudence, Indeed* is the story of a woman married to a man who appears to be, and believes himself to be, idealistic, unselfish and enlightened, but who is in fact the reverse of all these things; the novel tells of his wife's slow, rueful discovery of what she has really got. For most of the time, just to make things worse, she longs to have a baby but cannot; at the end, just as she's decided she can stand her husband no longer and her infertility was a blessing disguised—she finds herself pregnant. There is much wry, accurate observation here—of doctors and rich Jewish matrons, among others—and altogether you feel that this—like Miss Enright's book—is the product of a normal, civilized and rational mind.

These two books are not earth-shakers, they are not immortal masterpieces. They are not straining to be that which they cannot be; nor are they arrogantly challenging their readers to submit or be damned. They are admirable specimens of the kind of writing whose value Johnson recognised when he wrote:

> The author is not wholly useless, who provides innocent amusement for minds who seek refuge from vacuity. There are in the present state of things so many more instigations to evil than incitements to good, that he who keeps me in a neutral state may be justly considered as a benefactor to life.

That passage, incidentally, is an excellent specimen of what I mean by literary "humility"; and the fact that when one reads it today it *sounds* condescending (which it was not meant to be, and which I do not mean its present application to be) is in itself proof that we have lost that humility. We cannot imagine that something less ambitious is not therefore to be considered as inferior. But surely, if one

[5] DOUBLEFIELDS, by *Elizabeth Enright.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.75.
[6] PRUDENCE, INDEED, by *Anne Bernays.* Trident Press. $4.95.

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has decided that some works, in a genre of which the object should be to give pleasure, give more pleasure than others, then the only honest consequence is to affirm that the authors of the former works are better writers than those of the latter. Which I do affirm, without hesitation: that Miss Enright and Miss Bernays seem to me better writers than M. Robbe-Grillet and Herr Johnson. One has to report as one finds, and abide with fortitude whatever accusations of philistinism or squareness one is likely to receive.

So in another area where I find myself out of sympathy with what Peacock used to call "the march of the modern mind": the area of frankness about sex and so on. What I find genuinely shocking are not the scatology and pornography in themselves. There is quite a case for arguing that pornography does no great harm to anyone; there is an even better case that censorship is both ineffective and, in some of its side-effects, demonstrably more harmful than the pornography itself could ever be. But there is no case at all for that intellectual deception or self-deception which proclaims that pornography is not pornography at all, but is high art or deep philosophy or both. There is an enormous amount of such deception or self-deception in the contemporary air. The apotheoses of de Sade and William Burroughs are major examples, and this thing I have here, *The Image*[7], is a very minor one. I don't know if the Grove Press is regarded as a reputable firm; it won't stay so for long if it goes on printing offal of this sort. The book is merely a stream of masturbation fantasies of sado-masochism, written fairly obviously with tongue in cheek and profit in view; but it's all presented—and this is where Constant Weader really fwows up—as if it were saying something very profound about Woman and Man.

Is it yet another consequence of the Common Reader's disappearance that the Common Man, as subject, has also largely bowed out? The ordinary experiences of ordinary people (I shall sound squarer than ever) do seem very remote from the most esteemed contemporary fiction; and it is precisely their presence that I found gratifying in two works from Europe: Toivo Pekkanen's *My Childhood,*[8] which is from Finland, and Georges Bernanos' *Mouchette,*[9] from France. The former, perhaps, does not belong in a *Fiction* Chronicle, since it is presented as straight autobiography and probably is just that; but some of its glimpses of a very poor stonecutter's family, in a Finland which seems of legendary remoteness—before 1917, when it was still a province of the Empire of the Tsars—have that quality of real life heightened and illuminated which seems to me the basic criterion of good fiction. *Mouchette* is a grim little tale taken from Bernanos' usual material, the lives of the poor in the flat wet fields of north-eastern France. Like *My Childhood,* it describes a poverty which is really marginal, where the gross facts of hunger and cold never let

[7] THE IMAGE, by *Jean de Berg.* Grove Press. $5.00.
[8] MY CHILDHOOD, by *Toivo Pekkanen.* University of Wisconsin. $5.00.
[9] MOUCHETTE, by *Georges Bernanos.* Holt, Rinehart & Winston. $3.95.

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III. CRITICISM IN RENEWAL: THE NOVEL (Chairman, Roy Harvey Pearce, University of California at San Diego). Essays should focus on the problem of form and relevance in the novel—in particular, on the relation between the novelistic "subject," in its origins in the workaday world, and the form the novel takes. In order to achieve some parallelism, the panel speakers (two of whom will be J. Hillis Miller, of Johns Hopkins, and Stephen Gilman, of Harvard) will at some point in their papers treat of **Huckleberry Finn** as an instance. Essayists may want to use this novel as reference, although such reference is not necessary.

These topics will constitute the program of the 1967 session at Columbia University, September 5th through 8th. Prize-winners will read their essays at the session, which they will attend as guests of the Institute. The Supervising Committee of the Institute reserves the right to award fewer than three prizes, or no prize, according to its judgment of the quality of submitted essays.

Essays, which will be judged by members of the Supervising Committee, must be sent before July 1, 1967, to Professor C. L. Barber, the chairman of the 1967 session, Wright Hall 203, Smith College, Northampton, Mass. 01060. Essays must be no longer than 6000 words, typed double-spaced, and accompanied by a stamped, self-addressed envelope or, if submitted from abroad, by the appropriate international postage coupons.

1966 PRIZE WINNERS

Peter Elbow (Graduate Student, Brandeis University): "Two Boethian Speeches and Chaucerian Irony in **Troilus and Criseyde**"

Warner Berthoff (Bryn Mawr College): "The Study of Literature and the Recovery of the Historical"

Honorable Mention

A. D. Van Nostrand (Brown University): "The Lay of **Paterson**"

James E. Breslin (University of California, Berkeley): "Whitman and the Early Development of William Carlos Williams"

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themselves be forgotten. There is something Zolaesque about it, but without Zola's sensationalism and with a Christian pity which Zola never had.

Both *My Childhood* and *Mouchette* seemed to me admirably translated (by Alan Blair and J. C. Whitehouse respectively); and in that too they are exceptional. For I have been noticing for some time a steady, and of late vertiginous, decline in the quality of translations of fiction offered to the English-speaking public. One can fairly judge the translation of an imaginative work even when one does not know the original, for the minimum requirements—naturalness, clarity, literacy, a feeling for the qualities and powers of English—may be estimated with no reference to the other tongue. But it happens that among these novels is one translation which appeared to me immediately so atrocious that I did take the trouble to refer back and compare with the original—and the result was to confirm the atrociousness beyond my wildest fears. The novel is Françoise Sagan's *La Chamade*,[10] and the translator is Robert Westhoff. His errors, which are legion, may be grouped under three heads. First, plain literal elementary boners. *Un couple congestionné* ("a red-faced couple") becomes "a congested-looking couple." (Don't ask me what that is meant to mean in English: Mr. Westhoff often appears to be writing in a strange tongue all his own.) *Par souci de démagogie* ("to give an appearance of democracy") is turned into "as thoughtful tyrants." *Acheva la déroute de Lucile* ("completed her rout") is rendered "put an end to her thoughts." *Elle se savait sauvée; elle se sentait perdue* is translated with the same verb in each clause—"she felt saved; she felt lost"—thereby obliterating poor Mlle. Sagan's careful antithesis between "knew" and "felt." *Femmes du monde* ("fashionable women") becomes "housewives"—which incidentally makes nonsense of the sentence it occurs in. I could go on like this forever, but one more will do. *Elle haïssait le métro—fût-il direct* ("she hated the subway, even if it was the shortest way") is rendered "she hated the bus—even if it was direct." (Mr. Westhoff is convinced that the Paris Metro is a bus-service—he does this in other places—even though the text gives him elsewhere the correct word, *autobus.*) So much for the simple boners: next come meaningless literalisms, phrases which look as if the translator, utterly baffled by the French, has resorted to a grovelling transliteration, *une catastrophe matérielle* ("a financial disaster") becomes "a material calamity." The word *matériel,* indeed, is altogether too much for Mr. Westhoff. He meets it again in *un accident matériel* ("something wrong with the car," as the context makes clear), and this time comes up with "a material accident." He doesn't know the pejorative sense of *fameux* in *le fameux interne* ("the wretched doctor"), and emerges with—what do you suppose?—"the famous intern." *Une vigilance attendrie* ("an affectionate care") is dutifully turned into "a moving vigilance." And then there is a third sort of error: phrases so un-

[10] LA CHAMADE, by *Françoise Sagan.* E. P. Dutton. $3.95.

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idiomatic as to be scarcely English. *Les quarante mille francs qui leur manquaient* ("the 40,000 francs they still needed") is "the lacking 40,000 francs." *Amants de la veille* ("lovers since the evening before") becomes "lovers of one day." The heroine, poor thing, wants to drink "a frozen daiquiri" *(un daiquiri glacé),* instead of one that is "iced." When the context makes it perfectly clear that *inutile* means "unused," it is rendered "useless.". . . One imagines sometimes that Mr. Westhoff must be a French-speaker who doesn't know English; at other times that he is an English-speaker who doesn't know French.

La Chamade is not a good novel; it is very non-vintage Sagan. But that is no reason why two well-established publishers (John Murray in England, Dutton in this country) should offer to the English-speaking public such a shameful butchering of a text. And I think this matter of translations is of some importance. For three things are quite clear about the linguistic situation. First, American English is becoming a universal second language, of the West and its satellites certainly, and perhaps of the world. Second, the American people, even the educated élite among them, learn foreign languages with devout reluctance, and it is not possible to say of America, as it is (or used to be) of Europe, that no one would claim to be a cultivated man without a genuine knowledge of at least one language and literature other than his own. Third, as a result of the above, all literary works of any interest, worthy or unworthy, are certain to be immediately translated into American English and read in that form, and that form alone, by American readers. It follows that serious literary damage can be done by this mass of vile writing. I don't know the reasons for it. It may be due to poor paying by the publishers (this has been suggested in a recent correspondence in the *Times Literary Supplement),* which means that only the sorriest hacks will undertake it. Or it may stem from illiterate teaching of foreign languages, which sends forth graduates who have perhaps majored in this tongue or that but who have about as much feeling for the literary qualities of any language (their own included) as the language laboratories they did most of their learning in. But the result in any case, even in specimens better than Mr. Westhoff's, is that all works emerge in the same dreary, rhythmless, coarse-textured prose, the result of a dreadful insensitiveness to words. Such insensitiveness is surely one of the saddest, most dangerous things in our civilization; anything which contributes to that is not to be taken lightly.

What a bad translation does to a novel is analogous to what dubbed dialogue does to a film. It gives an effect of stiltedness, lifelessness: as anyone will know who has heard Sophia Loren acting in her native Italian as well as in dubbed (or acquired) American. In the former, she is a living actress; in the latter, an international puppet. The translator's problem, again, is not unlike that of the historical novelist; the former must transfer the quality of life from one language to another, the latter from one age to another. But the latter's, no less, is a prob-

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lem of language. Between archaism and contemporaneousness he must find a mean which will keep alive "the sense of the past" without destroying the sense that the past also was once alive. The two historical novels I have here—Mary Renault's *The Mask of Apollo*[11] and Bryher's *This January Tale*[12] do not, for my taste, achieve this. The former is concerned with Greece in the time of Plato, the latter with England during the Norman conquest; but both are written in a thin grey prose which has the effect of reducing both ages, and all the characters, to a common denominator of two-dimensional unreality. Everybody seems far too simple, too slow and rigid; yet people were just as complex, as uncertain then as they are now, and seemed so to themselves. That the present is more "difficult" than the past is a belief which every present cherishes: but it is always a delusion—as it must be, since it is always held—and one of the functions of historical art should be to expose it as delusion.

I come at last—with much relief—to the end of these dyspeptic diatribes, and to the contemplating of four novels which I feel are well "worth understanding." These are *Lazarus,* by Jerome Hartenfels;[13] *The 25th Hour,* by C. Virgil Gheorghiu;[14] *The Time of the Angels,* by Iris Murdoch;[15] and Nigel Dennis's *A House in Order.*[16] These are books which are, in their different ways, ambitious, but in which the ambition does not result in the fate of the self-inflated frog of the fable. They are all, also, *consistent* (though this must be qualified for *Lazarus);* each, that is, creates its own imaginative world, and, having created it, remains within it. *Lazarus,* as I say, is not entirely successful in achieving this. It begins admirably. Its first part is a brilliant farcical-horrific picture of a West Indian's misfortunes in London. Then it switches into Kafka-ish fantasy; the West Indian becomes the prisoner and victim of a mysterious, surrealist, symbolical (I suppose) "Institute," and from that point, I found, the individual vision was lost. One of the clichés of the modern imagination had taken its place. Mr. Hartenfels, it seems, is something of a linguistic oddity, in the Conrad manner; his "native tongue is German," says the blurb, "but he writes his fiction only in English." You would never guess it, except perhaps (as with Conrad too) that his English is unusually rich and resonant—and also, on the debit side, that he hasn't quite caught the idiom and rhythms of West Indian English. But Mr. Hartenfels, on the evidence of this, his first novel, is well worth watching.

The 25th Hour is the story of a Romanian "common man" in the Second World War, who, though he is not Jewish, is caught up in the

[11] THE MASK OF APOLLO, by *Mary Renault.* Pantheon. $5.95.

[12] THIS JANUARY TALE, by *Bryher.* Harcourt, Brace & World. $4.50.

[13] LAZARUS, by *Jerome Hartenfels.* Hill & Wang. $5.95.

[14] THE 25TH HOUR, by *C. Virgil Gheorghiu.* Regnery. $6.50. It is translated from the Romanian by Rita Eldon; and I ought to say, in fairness, that *this* translation reads excellently.

[15] THE TIME OF THE ANGELS, by *Iris Murdoch.* Viking Press. $5.00.

[16] A HOUSE IN ORDER, by *Nigel Dennis.* Vanguard. $4.95.

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German extermination-industry because a local policeman, who wants to get him out of the way, treacherously puts his name on the list of Jews. Thereafter he goes through the frightful ritual of the prison camps; others are dragged into it in his wake, or meet him on the way; in the end, he is "rescued" by the American army but is in fact a destroyed man. The nightmare is told with great power and irony; and the conclusion—the shattered man, with his family, being told by an amiable American photographer to "keep smiling"—has something of the grotesque horror of Gulliver, returned from the land of the Yahoos, swooning away when his loving wife tries to kiss him.

The Time of the Angels is, for me, a very welcome return to form of Iris Murdoch. Her recent books I have found more or less unreadable, with their arch whimsicalities and "Gothick" self-parodying; this new one has, in a sense, all the ingredients as before, but somehow or other the cooking has come right again. There are a crazy clergyman, his Negro maidservant and mistress, and his two daughters, also crazy (one of them believes herself to be his niece); they are all cooped up in the dark, bomb-damaged rectory of a London parish whose Wren-built church is also bomb-wrecked. Various would-be do-gooders fuss and manoeuvre outside the house, endeavouring in their ways to "save" the mad Rector and his mad girls. Incest is much to the fore; death, guilt and religion are heavily involved. It is no doubt a parable of sorts; it is saying, perhaps, that what is left of Christianity is either a ruined organization, a still potent but crazy superstition, or a ridiculously superficial philanthropy. But I may well be misinterpreting, and I don't think it matters. The imaginative creation holds firm, and the people, in the world Miss Murdoch has chosen to put them in, are entirely alive.

A House in Order also might be called a parable. It begins with an unnamed man, a cartographer in civil life, soldier of an unnamed country in an unnamed war, trying to be "taken prisoner" together with others of his compatriots. But the enemy will not accept him as an ordinary prisoner; he occupies a greenhouse near the wall of the prison-camp, and there he brings order out of a chaos of rubbish and cultivates with great success a variety of rare and delicate plants. He is a complete coward in all senses military or patriotic; his one desire is to keep out of the madness, as he sees it, of patriotism and war. But he finds himself involved, passively and most reluctantly, in aiding the escapes of the prisoners, organised by a formidable, unseen hero; he finds the enemy regarding him (to his horror) as a dangerous spy, to be greatly feared but admired; and in the end, safe back home after the war, he himself is regarded as a hero. But—because of that—he is not "safe," and never will be again. The parable is possibly one of the would-be opter-out from modern war: artist or scientist or simple coward, it doesn't matter. You are up to the neck in it, whether you like it or not. *A House in Order* is beautifully written, in a prose of tense lucidity; it is brief and spare, and it never takes its eye off the target.

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